נתנאלען אַ סאָנה:

ווען פֿון בלעטער שפּראָצן בלומען
און די בלומען ייִדיש רעדן,
קויקן דורות זיך מיט קלאַנגען
שפּרייַזן זיידעס מיט געזאַנגען.

IDEOLOGY, SOCIETY & LANGUAGE

The Odyssey of NATHAN BIRNBAUM

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successful in using it as a springboard to other matters will be time well spent. I hope that some 270 pages from here my readers will think so too.

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Chapter 2

Nathan Birnbaum's First Phase: From Zionism to Eastern European Jewry

THE PROVERBIAL "hundred and twenty years" have now elapsed since Nathan Birnbaum[1] was born on May 16, 1864 (equivalent to Iyar 10, 5624, of the traditional Jewish calendar). Among those who think frequently and earnestly about any aspect of the modern Jewish experience, he has been very much alive during all of this time, although "hard to place", in view of his involvement in Zionism *and* anti-Zionism, Hebrew *and* Yiddish, modernization *and* the return to religious Orthodoxy, Western European *and* Eastern European realities. As a result, he has been more remembered than analyzed, part of the background but rarely in the foreground of inquiry into any of the movements, periods or places with which he interacted and which he influenced. "A Jewish soul cannot be fully appreciated", a Yiddish proverb tells us. Birnbaum remains partially enigmatic, surrounded by riddles to this very day, giving ample testimony to the complexity and mystery of human behavior and motivation, in general, and to his own uniquely delicate balance between

constancy and metamorphosis, in particular. Perhaps it is best to begin our account of his first steps by admitting that this is so.

The Miracle and the Riddles

Many Central and South-Central European Jews, born in the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian monarch of pre-World War I days or in its successor states of the pre-World War II period, liked to claim that they were born in Vienna. Such a claim added the luster of Western culture and modern sensibilities to one's image, even though many of the claimants were actually (or were much closer to being) *bukoviner*[2] than *viner*. Nathan Birnbaum, however, was actually born in Vienna, the first and only child of parents who had only arrived there a few years earlier—as had thousands of other Jews—from the more easterly province of Galicia.[3] They were not very observant folk, although still somewhat traditional notwithstanding their eagerness to adopt a more Western Jewish lifestyle, and their son, by his own admission, soon became even less observant than his parents.[4] The German name that was given to him (apparently in admiration of "Nathan der Weise," an enlightened, tolerant and humanistic Jewish prototype created by the German dramatist and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 1729–1781) was indicative of their orientation and almost completely displaced his Jewish name (Nakhum, or, as it was pronounced among Yiddish speakers: Nokhem). A name is just a minor matter, in and of itself; nevertheless, it is one more straw in the wind which adds up to a veritable whirlwind of early counter-indicative signs vis-à-vis Birnbaum's ultimate Jewish identity.

What miracle led to Nathan Birnbaum's early stress upon the very Jewishness that his parents, his contemporaries and he himself, originally, so predictably de-emphasized? What really led to his life-long searches, aspirations and admonitions on Jewish themes? Why did *he* jump into that maelstrom of conflicts, tensions, poverty and prophecy, when practically all of his contemporaries of similar backgrounds headed straight down the paths of Germanized or other co-territorial assimilation and success in professional careers? Which Jewish and general occurrences during his childhood and youth might have

influenced him to adopt such an atypical direction? What personality characteristics fortified him, again and again, not only to face adversity but to court it? Perhaps a review of his first phase (through to the close of the Second World Zionist Congress in 1898), the most overlooked phase of the many through which he ultimately passed, will enable us not only to understand the subsequent phases better but also to better appreciate the unconflicted continuity of this constantly searching, questioning, re-evaluating, straining, creating and aspiring soul. There is no evaluating a human soul. The miracle at the center of all life will remain clothed in mystery, even if many of the riddles that surround it give way to analysis.

Germanized Jewry in the 1860s and 70s

Vienna was a center of Germanized Jewry, some of whose other centers were in the major urban areas of Germany proper while others were in Austro-Hungary. Although the Jews of these two countries were undoubtedly of a higher social class and of much more advanced Westernization, both in daily life and in High Culture, than were their Eastern European counterparts, they were, nevertheless, still quite uncertain and often deeply concerned with respect to their legal rights and their social status vis-à-vis their non-Jewish neighbors. It was not until 1872--eight years after Birnbaum's birth—that German Jews were granted full political rights. Nevertheless, attainment of this long-delayed status (attained by Austro-Hungarian Jews in 1867) hardly diminished the anti-semitism—populist, on the one hand, and intellectual, on the other—that had many times before reversed and postponed the granting of such rights. The reasons for this were many: partially economic (the rapid upward social mobility of urbanized Jewry elicited the envy and opposition of the bourgeosie as well as of the constantly growing proletariat), partially cultural (the number of Jewish writers, researchers, musicians and teachers—many of them destined to be internationally renowned: Freud, Mahler, Einstein, Kafka, etc.—increased dramatically, not to mention the legions of Jewish consumers of German literature, theatre, music, art and intellectual criticism on any and all topics),

partially political (Austro-Hungary was plagued by nationality secessionist movements and Germany itself had only just consolidated between 1866 and 1871, and its immediate victories over France, 1871, and the Jesuits, 1872, exacerbated local patriotism and xenophobia toward external competitors and internal "foreign bodies").

All of the foregoing processes and tensions merely served to accelerate the widespread Jewish passion for "Germanness" in language, customs, manners, tastes and *weltanschauung* as a whole.[5] Germanized Jews in general, but particularly those who hailed from Galicia and from even further to the East, consciously and repeatedly stressed their Germanness and denied or disguised as well as they could huge areas of their Jewish "differentness." Both the Reform movement as well as Neo-Orthodoxy stressed their patriotism, their devotion to the purest of pure German (Yiddish was widely ridiculed, among most Jews as well as among most non-Jews, whether spoken in its Western or in its Eastern variants, as "judelen" or as "mauschelen," i.e. as corrupted German spoken in the manner of Jews or "Moyshes"), and their absolute trust in *Bildung* (education) in general and in the superiority of German *Kultur* in particular. If anything appeared in the eyes of most Germanized Jews to be the very opposite of the image that *Kulturjuden* (Western educated, cultured Jews) should represent to the outer world, most particularly in the light of constant anti-Semitic rumblings, it was precisely the *Ostjuden* (Eastern European Jews). These were not only poorer and comparatively ignorant of Western, modern thought, but they were viewed as dirty, backward, physically stooped and repugnant: "ghetto Jews" who lived in "Halbasien" ("almost Asia") not only because they were forced to do so but because they knew no better due to their "rabbinic fanaticism" and "talmudic obscurantism".

During Birnbaum's childhood and adolescence culturally Germanized Jews who constituted the model for Viennese Jewish society, feared, above all else, to be suspected of "Eastern Jewish tendencies" or to be accused of revealing tell-tale "Eastern Jewish traits." Many, like Birnbaum's parents, were derived from easterly areas and most were painfully apprehensive lest they, their

parents or other relatives, lose the rights and the opportunities that they had so recently been granted and that still appeared to be so exposed and fragile in the face of innuendos, criticisms and attacks from some of their most influential non-Jewish neighbors. They either courted assimilation or passively drifted toward it, their Jewishness becoming ever more peripheral in their own eyes.

The Eastern European Invasion

In 1881, when Birnbaum was merely 17 years old, the insecurities of Germanized Jews came to be exposed to a trauma which only World War I brought to a temporary halt. Until then the objectionable in-migration of Eastern European Jews, seeking to benefit from the higher standard of living that characterized Germanized Jewry, was still bearable, aggravating though it was. Most of the newcomers until then had hailed originally from Posen (Poznan, previously a Polish province, first annexed by Prussia in 1793) or, subsequently, from Galicia; and, although they obviously complicated the so passionately cultivated "German-Jewish dialogue" that, it was hoped, would lead to full Jewish participation in German life, their numbers were at least reasonably manageable and most of these newcomers had been at least partially "civilized" by prior exposure to the blessings of Germanness in their regions of origin, even before arriving on the streets of Vienna or Berlin. However, after the 1881 pogroms in Czarist Russia—pogroms repeated again and again in the years that followed—there came an avalanche of Jewish transmigration and immigration, the magnitude and nature of which simply boggled the imagination. By 1914, nearly three million Eastern European Jews had crossed the German and Austro-Hungarian borders, most for shorter but some for longer periods of stay. And this avalanche brought precisely those *Ostjuden* who were entirely without the slightest grace of German culture. They provided German and Austro-Hungarian anti-Semites with ready-made excuses for mounting a vociferous campaign to "liberate" their countries "from the Jewish plague" and they destroyed forever the hopes of Germanized Jews that their cultivation of education, progress, aesthetic refinement and rationality would ultimately

lead to their full-fledged acceptance as Germans among Germans.[6]

The Eastern European floodtide evoked many different responses among Germanized Jews. Some redoubled their efforts in the direction of Germanization. Others moved in the direction of Zionist and Jewish nationalist sympathies. Among a very small group, and Birnbaum was one of their number, there even developed a rapprochement with Eastern European Jewry, sometimes merely along nostalgic lines, sometimes more overtly but yet, all in all, quite amateurishly and selectively, and, very rarely indeed, in the fashion of the *bal-tshuve*, the repentant returnee, who breathlessly pursued unlimited authenticity, following it determinedly from self-recognition to self-transformation.

Nathan Birnbaum's Early Jewish Convictions

I must admit that, in all truth, I cannot explain why Birnbaum, rather than most others, proceeded along this last mentioned, rarest of all the paths; why he, rather than others, remained so exceptional. His powerful personality and his constant internal restlessness inexorably led him exactly in those directions where others feared to tread. Although German culture had already deeply influenced his parents as well as himself, and although he was already deeply committed to anarcho-socialist thought,[7] he never considered himself to be a German, "although at that time there was not a single other Jewish youngster in Vienna who did not consider himself to be a German." If we ask why *that* was so we find no answer. Indeed, by 1881 Birnbaum was, on the one hand, less Jewishly observant than his mildly traditional parents, and, on the other hand, expressed views among his acquaintances which they would never have uttered, namely, that "Jews are a separate people and should really present themselves as such" since they "need to re-acquire their country, the Land of Israel."

Other Germanized Jewish intellectuals had already expressed similar heretical views. Indeed, Moses Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem* had appeared as far back as 1862 (in German, of course) and had scandalized the entire socialist intelligentsia of Western Europe. But Hess, for all of his falling from grace among leading European

socialists (who immediately caricatured him as "Rabbi Moses"), never became either a believing or a practicing Jew as a result of his "heresy." Birnbaum, on the other hand, quickly deduced several personal implications of his views and "began to study the Bible, engaged a teacher to study Talmud" with him, "read the Yiddish, and particularly, the Hebrew periodical press" and discovered thereby "the Jewish nationalist movement in Eastern Europe."

He was merely 19 years old when, as a confirmed pre-Herzlian Zionist, he began attending courses at the University of Vienna, first in "orientalistics" and then in jurisprudence. Much before Herzl came on the scene (and, most particularly, much before the Dreyfus affair of 1894 shocked the sensitivities of all Western Jewish intellectuals), he gave public talks and published brochures for Jewish students stressing that Jews were members of "a Jewish people, a people whose renaissance depended on the Land of Israel."[8] He literally coined the word "Zionism", both in German and in Hebrew,[9] and, together with a few other students at the same university—all of the others, by the way, Eastern European—he organized the first university-linked Jewish student organization,[10] *Kadimah* (1883) and founded, edited and published its journal *Selbst-Emancipation!* (1885),[11] a publication that soon reached far and wide among "Jewish ethnonationally" oriented students and other readers among German-speaking Jewry. He championed the need for unity among Jews, holding that otherwise no goals could be attained and no improvements in Jewish life were securable.[12] He bitterly criticized those whose Jewishness was merely the byproduct of anti-Semitism and who were kept from escaping from their own people only by the hatred of Jews among their co-territorial neighbors.[13] He argued that genuine cultural creativity was possible for Germanized Jews only on their assumption of deep bonds with their own people and its culture.[14] Otherwise they could attain no more than pale, inauthentic imitations of German culture, given that Christianity was a basic ingredient of that culture. Jews could evolve to new moral heights (he was an opponent of Jewish urbanism and commercialism from his earliest writings, considering them both to be moral negatives), he believed, only if they cultivated Judaism and settled on the soil of the Land of Israel.[15] Iconoclastically, he

stressed that socialism would not result in a better world as long as it did not support the aspirations of small peoples, the Jews among them, for ethnonational recognition. On the contrary, he predicted socialism would merely lead to a new kind of barbarism unless, like the Jewish prophets of old, it became associated with the principles of ethics and justice between nationalities. He felt that America could not save the Jewish soul because that soul could become strong and creative only on the soil of its historic homeland where it would not need to imitate others.[16] Assimilation could no more provide a constructive answer to the problems of the Jewish people, he believed, than suicide could provide an answer to the problems of Jewish individuals.[17] He co-authored a correspondence course so that adults could master Hebrew at home,[18] since he was convinced that only through Hebrew could the Jewish soul be awakened.[19] He celebrated the growth of Hebrew courses, clubs and periodicals, both in Eastern Europe and in Palestine. Above all he stressed the importance of the Land of Israel for "modern" (that is for Westernized and, particularly, for Germanized) Jews, because only there, he believed, could Jewish socialism and Jewish modernity develop hand in hand.[20] Only Zionism, he maintained, could unite Jewish thought with pan-human thought. He considered Zionism to be, first and foremost, a *cultural* movement that enriched Eastern European Jews by stimulating them to modernity (both in Yiddish and in Hebrew), and by bringing Western European Jews to genuine Jewish ethnonational identity.[21] Zionism alone, he believed, could bring them both together and unite them again into one people, as they had been before the Westernization, emancipation and assimilation of Western European Jews. Zionism could give both Western and Eastern Jews a joint footing in a land where Jews would once again be able to contribute to the ethical and the aesthetic progress of mankind as a whole, as they had done in days of old.[22]

Today, when ideas, formulations and emphases that were original with Birnbaum have entered into the mainstream of ordinary (and even tritely propagandistic) phraseology, and when the reality of Israel is often much different from what Birnbaum had imagined it would be, it is easy to overlook the originality and

even the revolutionary nature of Birnbaum's Zionist pronouncements. In stark contrast to Herzl and most other Germanized Zionists, Birnbaum obviously did not stress mobilizing Western Jewish political pressure and Western Jewish access to funds in order to save Eastern European Jews from persecution, discrimination, poverty and backwardness.[23] For Birnbaum, Zionism was not at all a tremendous charity campaign on behalf of pitiful *Ostjuden*. Zionism was, instead, a movement on behalf of cultural regeneration, for reunification of East and West, fostering renewed and strengthened Jewish ethical, aesthetic and social elevation and creativity.

Birnbaum's views concerning Zionism changed radically in later days, as did his attitudes toward Judaism and Jewishness. He became less and less enamoured of altering or rebuilding either of them and more and more convinced of the eternal values, initially of modern Yiddish language and literature and, ultimately, of the tradition-anchored Jewish life and thought of Eastern European Jews. After the Second World Zionist Congress he withdrew from any affiliation with official, organizational Zionism *per se* and completely severed his contacts with Herzl, with whom he differed fundamentally on many theoretical, practical and personal grounds. However, until the very end of his days he remained the defender, the inspired interpreter and the devoted stimulator of Jewish creativity, Jewish thought and Jewish longings for salvation via an authentic and elevated Jewish life.

Nathan Birnbaum's Early Attitudes Toward Yiddish

Attitudes toward the language in which a culture is implemented, symbolized and indexed are, of necessity, related to attitudes toward the culture as a whole. And so it was with Birnbaum as well. His views concerning Yiddish developed and changed slowly during his first phase. Initially, his views were based on the premise that only Hebrew was capable of rendering conscious, reviving and elevating the suppressed ethnonational feelings of Germanized Jews.[24] Accordingly, he initially viewed Yiddish as "that hoarse child of the Ghetto," even though he was aware quite early that it not only had its intellectual defenders but

an enviable literature as well. Nevertheless, the best that he could foresee for it was that this "miscarriage of the diaspora," unworthy of being the instrument of a cultured people in search of its former greatness,[25] would help achieve the success of that search, the Zionist search, and, after bringing the masses into the mainstream of that success, would seal its own doom. This view of Yiddish, as worthless in itself but as a bridge to worthwhile goals, was hardly an original thought, but, rather, one that was quite widespread at the time among Jewish intellectuals in both Eastern and Western Europe. Nevertheless, even with all his negativeness toward Yiddish at this early point in his development, Birnbaum was also convinced that the Zionist movement had not yet taken the role of Yiddish seriously enough. He was never one to let go of an issue, to be satisfied with facile answers, whether they be those of others or his own. He began his voyage toward Yiddish in the very phase in which he was most critical of it, indeed, in the very same articles in which he berated it. He began by extolling Eastern European Jewry, its vitality and its authenticity.

After his departure from active Zionist efforts, the appreciation of Eastern European Jewry and of its language, Yiddish, becomes a dominant theme in his writing, but even in the first phase it was already there. He bemoaned the fact that the publications and literature by and for Germanized Jews had reduced Judaism to a "Mosaic confession." By so doing they had effectively assimilated, alienated, estranged and destroyed their own readers.[26] Modern Hebrew literature and the modern Hebrew press of Eastern Europe were the true media of Jewish self-defense, but the vast majority of Jews of Central and Western Europe had absolutely no access to them. How good it would be, he wrote, if the East could help the West in the difficult task of interesting readers in Jewish history, customs and literature. Zionism would never be able to reach its own (actually Birnbaum's own) goals unless the mighty East could influence the anemic West to become its partner on behalf of the rebirth of the Jewish people via the cultivation of its own ethnonational identity, ethnonational customs and ethnonational economy.

In this, his very first phase, Birnbaum had already turned trite Germanized-Zionist sloganeering upside-down. For Birnbaum,

Zionism was a movement on behalf of Jewish culture, and not just a movement to foster immigration to Palestine. It was a movement to Judaize the interests and behaviors of Germanized Jews, rather than merely to save the lives of *Ostjuden*. It had goals in the realm of traditional and plebian customs, rather than only highsounding political, economic and philosophical goals, a realm which he recognized as being entirely unattainable in either German or Hebrew. As far as Hebrew itself was concerned, Birnbaum was honest enough to grant that even the Zionist movement rarely either required or stimulated its members to really learn it. On the other hand, there were many great masters of Hebrew, both in the East and in the West, who were either assimilationists or anti-Zionists.[27] The surging Jewish life of Eastern Europe was primarily based neither on Zionism nor on Hebrew. After his disappointments, on both personal and philosophical levels, at the first two World Zionist Congresses (1897, 1898)—which deserve separate treatment elsewhere—Birnbaum was ready to go to the East itself and to immerse himself in it, rather than to wait for the East to come to the West in order to invigorate it. And this brought him not only to positiveness and activism on behalf of Yiddish but to a level "even higher than that."[28]

Notes and References

1. During much of his life N.B. was referred to as *Nosn Birnboym*, (in accordance with the rules of Yiddish phonology), and there is good reason to refer to him so today so that the English-speaking world may know the name by which the vast majority of his contemporaries called him. We speak of Johann Sebastian Bach, not John Steven, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, not some Americanization or Anglicization of those names. However, their cases are not really fully comparable to N.B.'s. He did call himself Nathan Birnbaum in his numerous German writings (when he did not use a pseudonym). He referred to himself by this name fairly exclusively during the first half of his life and very commonly during the last half as well. If we add to the above considerations the further fact that the literature about him in all languages other than Yiddish (or Yiddish *and* Hebrew, if the latter too is pronounced in the Askhenazi or Central and Eastern European fashions) all utilize the German version of his name, then we must come to the conclusion that a break with this spelling (and pronunciation) convention might now be more confusing than enlightening. Nevertheless, in my own spoken references to N.B. I continue to use the Yiddish

form of his name, Nosn Birnboym (and have done so in one or two of my earlier published mentions of him), precisely because I feel that it tells us something about him that the German version does not convey. How typical this is of N.B.! Neither version of his name can fully represent him.

2. A Yiddish speaking Jew might inquire about a third party "er iz take a *viner*?" ("Is he really Viennese?") and the answer might come back "nit azoy a viner vi a *buko*viner" (not exactly Viennese, but rather from Bukovina). We will have more to say about Bukovina in our discussion of a later chapter of N.B.'s life ("Nathan Birnbaum's Second Phase: The Champion of Yiddish and Jewish Cultural Autonomy").

3. Galicia, now a region in Southeast Poland and the Northwest Ukrainian S.S.R., was formerly (after the first partition of Poland in 1772) an Austrian crownland. The German-Jewish *haskole* or Enlightenment movement, seeking to Germanize, modernize, and "normalize" Jewish life, intellectually, politically and economically, penetrated Galicia almost from the time of its very origins in Berlin under Moses Mendelssohn and produced in Galicia a large roster of scholars and literary figures. Full political rights were granted to Galician Jews in 1859. For further details see Paul R. Magocsi, *Galicia: A Historical Survey and Bibliographic Guide.* Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983. Concerning Galician Jews in Vienna, see Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna: 1867–1914.* Albany, SUNY Press, 1983, and M. Henisch, Galician Jews in Vienna in Josef Fraenkel, ed. *The Jews of Austria: Essays on Their Life, History and Destruction.* London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1970, 361–373.

4. See his "An iberblik iber mayn lebn (A review of my life)", *Yubileyum-bukh tsum zekhtsikstn geburtstog fun dr. nosn birnboym (Sixtieth Birthday Celebration Volume).* Warsaw, Yeshurin, 1925.

5. Smaller contingents of Jews were also becoming Magyarized, Polonized, etc., but these also frequently regarded German and Germanness as "higher states" in accord with socio-cultural and socio-economic realities up to World War I. Germanization, therefore, was long a key process among Jews in Central and Eastern Europe and a key antithesis in most of Birnbaum's exertions throughout his life.

6. There is considerable literature dealing with the rational and irrational fears and antipathies that Germanized Jews of the latter part of the 19th century harbored vis-à-vis East European Jews, the latter commonly being viewed as "spoilers" of the acceptance that Germanized Jews generally sought within the world of German culture. For introductory readings in this area, see Aschheim, Steven E. *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jews in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923.* Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1982; Gilman, Sander L. *Jewish Self-Hatred.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986; and Reinharz, Jehuda. "East European Jews in the *Weltanschauung* of German Zionists, 1882–1914," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry,* 1984, 1, 55–95. For an introduction to the deeply ingrained German (and Austrian-German) anti-Semitism of the period, see Bronsen, David (ed.). *Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1933: The Problematic Symbiosis.* Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1979; Kahn, Robert. "German-speaking Jewry during Austria-Hungary's constitutional era (1867–1918)," *Jewish Social Studies,* 1948, 10, 239–256; Lea, Charlene A. *Emancipation, Assimilation and Stereotype: The Image of the Jew in German and Austrian Drama (1800–1850).* Bonn, Bouvier, 1978; Poliakov, Leon. *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe.* New York, Basic Books, 1971; Rothkrug, Lionel. "Peasant and Jew: fears of pollution and German collective perceptions," *Historical Reflections,* 1983, 10, 59–77; and Tal, Uriel. *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914.* Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1975. For initial exploration of the Jewish passion for secularization, modernization and Germanization, see Bach, H.I. *The German Jew: A Synthesis of Judaism and Western Civilization, 1730–1930.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985; Cuddihy, J.M. *The Ordeal of Civility.* New York, Basic Books, 1975; Gay, Peter. *Freud, Jews and Other Germans: Masters and Victims in Modernized Culture.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978; Lamberti, Marjorie. *Jewish Activism in Imperial Germany.* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975; Pawel, Ernst. *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka.* New York, Straus and Giroux, 1984; Richarz, Monika (ed.). *Judisches Leben in Deutschland.* 3 vols. Stuttgart, Deutsches Verlag-Anstalt, 1976, 1979, 1985; and most of the contributions to Reinharz, Jehuda and Walter Schatzberg, eds. *The Jewish Response to German Culture.* Hanover and London, University Press of New England, 1985.

7. See footnote 4, above.

8. Nathan Birnbaum (=N.B.). *Die Assimilationssucht. Ein Wort an die sogenannten Deutschen, Slaven, Magyarwn, etc. mosaicher Confession. Von einem Studenten judischer Nationalitat.* Several aspects of this title show the influence of Pinsker's *Autoemanzipation* (see footnote 11, below).

9. Confirmed most recently by G. Kresl. Mi haya harishon shehamzi et hamila zionut? (Who was the first to coin the word Zionism?) *Et-mol,* 1978, 3, 22–33. Earlier views arriving at the same conclusion are those of the Hebrew writer and philosopher Akhad Ha'am (1856–1927), with whom Birnbaum differed sharply with respect to the value to be assigned to Yiddish, and Alex Bein, former director of the Central Zionist Archives and State Archivist of Israel. See the latter's "The origin of the term and concept 'Zionism'", in Raphael Patai (ed.), *Herzl Year Book,* v. II. New York, Herzl Press, 1959.

10. The text of the call to Jewish students to join the new organization is reproduced in Hugo Gold, *Geschichte der Juden Wien: Ein Gedenkbuch.* Tel Aviv, Olamenu, 1966. The name "Kadimah" signifies "eastward" as well as "forward" and was suggested by Perets Smolenskin (1840–1885), Russian-Jewish Hebrew novelist and journalist. Smolenskin spent 17 years of his life in Vienna, where he published his influential journal *Hashakhar* and worked as the Hebrew proof-reader for a well-known publishing house. For various accounts and interpretations of the work of "Kadimah", see Cahnman, Werner J. "The fighting Kadimah," *Chicago Jewish Forum,* 1958, 17, no. 1, 24–27; Pass, Harriet Z. *Jewish Nationalism in Vienna before Herzl.* M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1970; Rosenheck, Ludwig (ed.). *Festschrift Kadimah.* Modling, 1933 (contains six articles,

one by Birnbaum); and Schoeps, Julius H. "Modern heirs of the Maccabees; The beginning of the Vienna Kadimah, 1882–1897," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 1982, 27, 155–170 (contains extensive bibliography).

11. *Selbst-Emancipation! Zeitschrift fur die nationalen, socialen und politischen Interessen des Juddischen Stammes.* Since this name was obviously inspired by Leon Pinsker's seminal volume *Autoemanzipation; Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden* (1882), the slight alteration in name (from *Auto-* to *Selbst-* is but another indication of Birnbaum's need for independence, for being original or at least different, in small things as well as in large ones. With some interruptions *Selbst-Emancipation* continued to be published until 1895. For further details, see G. Kresl. "Zelbstemantsipatsyon" (in Hebrew). *Shivat zion.* 1956–1957, 4, 55–99.

12. N.B. "Panjudaismus," *Selbst-Emancipation!* (=*S-E*). 1885, 1 no. 6.

13. N.B. "Verjudung-Entjudung," *S-E.* 1885, 1, no. 7.

14. N.B. "Unsere Culturaufgabe," *S-E.* 1885, 1, no. 19.

15. N.B. "Volksthum und Weltbürgerthum," *S-E.* 1890, 3, no. 2.*

16. N.B. "Osten und Westen," *S-E.* 1890, 3, no. 14.

17. N.B. "Um Ehre und Wohlfahrt unseres Volkes," *S-E.* 1890, 3, no. 1.

18. N.B. and Eliahu Saphir. *Brieflicher Sprach- und Sprech-Unterricht zur Erlernung der hebräischen Sprache.* Vienna, 1893. Four lessons (called "Letters," in view of their correspondence course format) appeared, the first three, printed and the fourth, written in N.B.'s own hand.

19. N.B. *Die nationale Wiedergeburt des jüdischen Volkes in Seinem Lande als Mittel zur Lösung der Judenfrage.* Vienna, 1893. Note that Herzl's *Judenstaat* did not appear until 1896.

20. N.B. "Die jüdische Moderne," *Zion.* 1896, 2, nos. 7–10. (Also published as a separate brochure: Leipzig, 1896) This publication is signed "Mathias Acher", one of Birnbaum's pseudonyms. It dates back to 1895 and remains in use (and in many years, in very frequent use) until 1916. (See Chapter 5, footnote 27, for a discussion of the significance of this pseudonym). As for "Die jüdische Moderne", Martin Buber claimed that his accidental reading of this article/brochure in 1898 converted him to lifetime Zionism.

21. N.B. "Judaismus und Hellenismus," *Die Zeit.* 1896, 8, no. 94. Birnbaum may well have coined the terms Ostjuden and Westjuden and established them as polar opposites (but bridgable ones, from his point of view).

22. N.B. *Der Zionismus als Kulturbewegung. Referat Gehalten auf dem Zionisten-Kongresas in Basel am 29 August, 1897.* Published, subsequently, as part of his *Zwei Vorträge über Zionismus.* Berlin, 1898.

23. For analyses of the more common German-Jewish approach to the goals of Zionism, see Adolf Böhm, *Die zionistische Bewegung bis zum Ende des Weltkrieges.* Tel Aviv, Hozaah Ivrith, 1935, and, even more sharply delineated: Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 1893–1914.* Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1975.

24. N.B. "Nationalität und Sprache," *S-E.* 1886, 2, no. 4.*

25. N.B. "Der jüdische Jargon," *S-E.* 1890, 3, no. 15.*

*Asterisked items have been translated and included in this Volume.

26. N.B. "Jüdische Literatur und judische Zeitungen," *S-E.* 1892, 5, no. 1.*

27. N.B. "Hebräische Sprache," *S-E.* 1892, 5, no. 14.

28. The allusion here is to a short story by the modern Yiddish classicist I.L. Perets (1852–1915), "If Not Even Higher", in which one who originally doubted that the saintly Rabbi of Nemerov actually ascended to heaven, prior to the High Holidays, in order to intercede on behalf of his flock, finally opines (after secretly observing the rabbi's anonymous efforts to minister to the needs of the sick and the poor) that the rabbi's ascent was "evèn higher" than that which his followers claimed.

Chapter 3

Nathan Birnbaum's Second Phase: The Champion of Yiddish and Jewish Cultural Autonomy

IF THERE ARE unanswered questions and unexplainable (some might say: miraculous) developments in Nathan Birnbaum's first stage, a stage in which he travelled from a very brief period of left-wing disinterest in Jewish matters of any kind to a passionate interest in "Zionism as a cultural movement," his second chapter is, if anything, even more unusual and idiosyncratic. Even in his first stage he had come to criticize the empty-headedness and outright ignorance vis-à-vis Jewish matters of most of his Germanized Zionist contemporaries in Vienna, Berlin, Prague and other urban centers of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Their Zionism neither derived from nor led to personal Jewish commitments, whether at the individual or at the societal level. At best, they sought a place of refuge for the persecuted "Ostjuden" of the Czarist Empire; at worst, they sought to guarantee a place to which they themselves could escape if their own situation in the "civilized" West were ever to deteriorate "beyond control." Later, in his religious phase, he would call them

"café Zionists." Since anti-Semites had once insulted them in their favorite cafe in Berlin or Vienna, they were interested in a Jewish homeland in Palestine so that there would be a place where they could drink their coffee quietly, without embarrassment. The fact that Herzl devoted almost all of his time to high level political activity, meeting with heads of states and other influential world leaders, deeply troubled Birnbaum, and the fact that almost all of those whom Birnbaum had so painstakingly attracted to Zionism now proceeded to flock to Herzl's corner, disappointed him greatly and alienated him from official Zionism all the more. Herzl's lack of Jewish knowledge, of personal Jewish observance of *any* kind, of any appreciation for the deeply Jewish life and robust national identity of Eastern European Jews and their most creative intellectuals, all these things provided Birnbaum with additional rationale for a rupture with the movement that he had co-founded, had named, had served, and had led for nearly a score of years. However, his major impetus was clearly that he identified increasingly with Eastern European Jewry, with a Jewry which was not about to pull up stakes, with a Jewry that appeared as deep and as permanent as the sea itself, a sea in which he himself began to swim with increasing frequency and ease, a sea that led him eastward, but to Tshernovits rather than to Jerusalem. With his estrangement, Western European Zionism lost an important, original and Jewishly authentic force whose absence many soon came to regret.[1] Birnbaum, for his part, maintained a life-long interest in planned Jewish concentration, and, when necessary, planned resettlement, but did so entirely outside of the Zionist establishment and in frequent opposition to Zionist thought.[2] During the ensuing 15–16 years, i.e. from after the Second Zionist World Congress in 1898 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, he concentrated primarily on two themes: Jewish cultural autonomy and the importance of the Yiddish language. By the end of this period he had already begun to move in the direction of his third and final phase: traditional Jewish Orthodoxy.

Cultural Autonomy for Jews

Birnbaum came to regard the ever more vociferous struggle of nationalities within the Austro-Hungarian Empire (i.e., the struggles of nationalities that co-inhabited the same provinces and competed for the control of the provinces in which they resided) as a natural opportunity to achieve one of his main goals: the organized concentration and subvention of Jewish cultural life. He viewed such concentration and subvention as being doubly desirable. On the one hand, it would provide some defense against the strident racism which was becoming alarmingly fashionable (and, therefore, doubly dangerous) as a result of the pseudo-scientific writings of such figures as Stuart Houston Chamberlain,[3] who managed simultaneously to extol ancient Judaism and to defame its modern-day practitioners as the carriers of a biological and psychological infection throughout Christian Europe. Cultural autonomy would provide modern Jews with respectability in the eyes of their co-territorial neighbors. But in addition, and even more importantly, cultural autonomy would stem the specious assimilation of East European Jewish intellectuals in the direction of rapid, "copy cat" Germanization, Polonization, Magyarization or Russification. Finally, he believed that organized stability and concentration of Jewish cultural life could be realized only if the Austro-Hungarian government (but, later on, also the governments of the Czarist Empire and of the USA, the former hopefully becoming more democratic and the latter, more attentive to its growing Jewish immigrant population) would recognize Yiddish in its own bureaus and offices, in schools for Jewish children and via stipends for writers, poets and journalists. In 1905 he first presented his thinking along these lines (in German, of course; he was not yet up to lecturing in Yiddish) to a sympathetic Jewish audience precisely in Tshernovits,[4] a city that was to loom large in his later activities. Three years later he would return there, to convene the "First World Conference for the Yiddish Language," a conference which had not only language goals but which was a building-block in his broader program for Jewish cultural autonomy. He subsequently proceeded to spell out his ideas about cultural autonomy both in

his own journal *Neue Zeitung* (Vienna 1906–1907) and in a variety of other periodicals, stressing the view that Jews were as entitled to cultural autonomy as were the other contending nationalities (Serbs and Croatians, "Czechoslavs", Italians, Poles, Ukrainians—then more commonly called Ruthenians, particularly in Austria-Hungary—Rumanians and Slovenians) who sought it. In all of his arguments he pointed to Eastern European Jews as a sterling example to be emulated and assisted. Whereas assimilatory Jewish intellectuals were still seeking to escape from Jewishness, thereby losing any semblance of a national character of their own without fully acquiring any other, Eastern European Jewish thinkers—Zionists and Bundist-Socialists alike—were being drawn increasingly into the proud struggle for cultural autonomy.[5] At the "Conference of Nationalities" on June 7, 1905, in Vienna, where more than half of all the participants were Jews, only Nathan Birnbaum came as a (self-proclaimed) representative of the "Jewish nationality."[6]. He stressed that Austro-Hungary existed to serve its people, and not vice versa, and that this goal could best be attained when these peoples regulated their own cultural affairs. Western Jews in Austro-Hungary were particularly in need of the possibilities that cultural autonomy would provide, because otherwise they were faced with total assimilatory extinction. Galician and Bukovinian Jewry, on the other hand, would not only further enrich their still vibrant traditions via cultural autonomy but would serve as examples for their more Westerly brothers, as well as for the Jews of the Czarist Empire, who could only dream of cultural autonomy in their current oppressed situation.[7] As early as 1906 Birnbaum began to stress that Jews needed to declare Yiddish to be their "language of normal discourse" in the census that was being planned for 1910, if their cultural autonomy aspirations were to be taken seriously. Even if cultural autonomy were not to fully solve all the problems of Austro-Hungarian Jewry (he held, e.g., that even socialism would not be able to quickly end anti-Semitism because of the latter's deeply ingrained position in most Christian cultures), it would, nevertheless, help minimize inter-group friction (each group being in control of its own tax-derived funds and its own institutions) and provide Jews with both a sense of pride and a

sense of security that would transfer to other areas as well.[8] At this point he also decided to become a candidate for the Austrian Parliament.

Birnbaum's Failure in the Elections of 1907

Jews had traditionally voted for the ruling ethnic group in each of the two sections of the Empire in which they were concentrated. They voted primarily for German candidates in Bukovina and for Polish candidates in Galicia, thereby often damaging the aspirations of the Ukrainians/Ruthenians in both areas.[9] Even when they did vote for Jewish candidates—indeed, by then there were already a few Jewish members of Parliament—these were generally Germanized or Polonized Jews without the slightest interest in Jewish concerns or aspirations. However, 1907 promised to be an election with a difference. There were several "genuinely Jewish" candidates, most of them running with the support of one or another of the various Galician Zionist groups who were really willing to do "Gegenwartsarbeit" (work for the here and now) rather than solely stress the homeland, in Palestine, that was far off both in time and place. Although Birnbaum did not seek Zionist support, running on a ticket of his own, he was nevertheless supported not only by most Jews in his district (Bitshutsh, Galicia) but even by the Ruthenians whose cause he had long championed. Nevertheless, Birnbaum lost the elections because of irregularities and illegalities engineered by the ruling Polish local administration.[10] Troops were sent to seal off the bridges leading into town and to expel from the polls those suspected of anti-Polish sentiments, so that, in one way or another, most Jews and Ruthenians were kept from casting their ballots. On the other hand, a few dozen hired hands "voted early and often," not only in their own names but in the names of hundreds of individuals who had died since the last elections but whose names were still on the election rolls. Some Jews joked that "Koyhanem (members of the traditional Jewish priestly caste) were obliged to keep away from the ballot box because so many dead folk were obviously in its vicinity." Birnbaum found the situation far from funny and sent off telegram after telegram protesting

these irregularities to the Ministry of the Interior in Vienna, but to no avail. The district had been "promised" to the Poles and Birnbaum never set foot in Parliament. Years later, the great Hebrew Nobel Prize Laureate, Agnon, who witnessed these events as a young man growing up in Bitshutsh, wrote up the entire incident in one of his works.[11] It was neither the first nor the last rigged election in Galicia.[12] Characteristically, Birnbaum snapped back from his defeat and responded to it by intensifying his struggle for Jewish cultural autonomy.

He threw himself into his earlier plan for a "World Conference for the Yiddish Language" and brought his plans to fruition in 1908, after returning from a brief visit to the U.S.A., thanks to the help of his admirers in Tshernovits, many of whom had been students at the University of Vienna and, had, therefore, long been under his spell. He thundered away at those Eastern European Jewish intellectuals who parroted their benighted counterparts in the West, exchanging their vibrant birthright for pale imitations of non-Jewish cultures.[13] He preached the "emancipation of Eastern European Jewry from Western Jewish tutelage,"[14] the liberation of "genuine Jews" from "false Germans." Although he himself had been born in Vienna, he referred to Eastern European Jews as "we" and "us" and to *"Yehudim"* (an Eastern European reference to Germanized Jews) as "they" and "them." He urged Eastern European Jews to establish a parliament for all of world Jewry, but one that they rather than the Yehudim would control, so that they could advance not only their own culture but save Jewry at large. Only Eastern European Jewry still possessed a great, creative, independent Jewish way of life and only it, therefore, could nourish less fortunate Jewries elsewhere. Again and again he returned to the issue of cultural autonomy (particularly to the need for schools, at all levels, in which Yiddish would be the language of instruction), to the legitimization of *nine* nationalities in the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, rather than just *eight*.[15] He headed the non-partisan committee that brought together 3,000 Jews (a large number for those days) to demonstrate in Tshernovits, in 1910, against the regulation that excluded Yiddish from the list of permissible vernaculars for the forthcoming census.[16] He refused to become

discouraged at his meager progress on the cultural autonomy front, realizing full well that "every victory in the life of a people must be built upon many losses and sacrifices."

Birnbaum and Yiddish: Love Without Limits but Without Rejection of Hebrew

In his own biographic sketch,[17] Birnbaum tells us that he "came naturally to the language of the diaspora, Yiddish, after having come to diaspora nationalism and, accordingly, began a long struggle to gain for it the dignity and honor it deserved." His earlier negativism toward Yiddish, during his Zionist phase, disappeared completely and even his ambivalence (regarding Yiddish as valuable only insofar as it permitted intellectuals to influence the masses in directions that would ultimately undercut Yiddish) vanished and was replaced by unadulterated adoration. Typically enough, Western aesthete that he was, his transformation began with the Yiddish stage (as did Kafka's too, somewhat later). The Yiddish theatre reflected an independent soul, an authentic culture, whereas German Jewish theatre, no matter how refined it might be as drama, was enslaved to a foreign model.[18] However, both Yiddish and Hebrew had strong claims upon him and he ultimately arrived at a view that accommodated them both and that totally rejected the extremists at both ends who rejected each other's favorite language. He considered both languages to be vital and, therefore, viewed the extremists as doing great damage to the entire Jewish people. Basically, he believed that only the new creativity that was related to Yiddish could result in a modern Jewish life in which Hebrew too would remain vibrant in its non-vernacular functions.[19] Through Yiddish, millions of Jews gained entry into a modern Jewish culture. Through Yiddish they immediately joined the ranks of all those who struggled for cultural autonomy. He viewed Eastern European Yiddish as being incomparably richer than its Western counterpart in the German speaking countries. Indeed, he compared Eastern European Yiddish to English, i.e. to another widespread fusion language which had arrived at an elevated, elevating and proud internal unity.[20] Initially he flirted with the

idea of writing Yiddish with Latin letters (as did several others at the time) but this was just a passing thought. What was constant in his thinking was a concern to develop the language, attract more intellectuals to it, gain for it rights, recognition and protection via Jewish cultural autonomy.

Never a theoretical or platonic lover, he immediately set to work to serve his beloved. In 1905, at the University of Vienna, he organized the very first academically affiliated student organization on behalf of Yiddish, "Yidishe kultur,"[21] whose members, many of them hailing *from* Tshernovits, soon formed the administrative unit that convened and conducted the "First World Conference for the Yiddish Language" *in* Tshernovits. He also arranged "tours" for Yiddish writers that took them through various towns and townlets in Galicia, accompanying them and introducing them in German wherever that was necessary to gain a proper hearing for them.[22]

With respect to the competition between Hebrew and Yiddish, both of which went through intense cultural and political symbolic elaboration at the same time, leading to a heated and bitter competition between them, Birnbaum remained a peacemaker. He felt that Hebrew was no more dead than Yiddish was a jargon. He rejected the error that viewed "the only real Jewish language" (Hebrew) as not being alive and "the only live Jewish tongue" (Yiddish) as not being a language.[23] Although he resorted frequently to the usual romantic imagery of the age he also managed to transcend it on occasion and to point out that Yiddish did not create the Jewish people but served it, organized it by providing it with a superb communication channel, and united it around common experiences and symbols. The fact that intellectuals ridiculed it saddened him tremendously because he regarded such behavior as a sign of their opportunism and of their insecurity in the face of non-Jewish prejudices. He defended Yiddish against the attacks of Eastern European Zionists and philosophers.[24] Before the Tshernovits Conference convened, he wrote articles in German explaining its importance and who its luminaries would be.[25] He gave the opening address at the conference (in Yiddish, for the first time in his life).[26] He spoke again at its festive banquet (this time in his most flowery German).

He refrained from polemics with both sets of extremists that attended the conference and firmly supported (some say: originated) the minimalistic resolution (Yiddish is *an* ethnonational language of the Jewish people, not *the* ethnonational language of the Jewish people) so that no official statement issuing from the conference would besmirch the good name of Hebrew. After the conference he defended this controversial resolution that made it famous[27] (the view that Yiddish was *"an* ethnonational language of the Jewish people") as tantamount to a veritable revolution in the previously established relationship between Hebrew and its "servant girl". He also defended Tshernovits as the logical place to have held a conference which was to be but the first step in the march toward cultural autonomy.[28] He never tired of explaining that only among those who cultivated Yiddish as a bastion against assimilation would Hebrew also be retained as a bastion against assimilation.[29]

The End of an Era

After the conference Birnbaum remained in Tshernovits for only three years, i.e. to 1911, even though he had been asked to establish a permanent secretariat there for its ongoing "cultural work." His bookstore there (established with the support of a "Young Ukrainian" organization, out of gratitude for his constant ideological support for their efforts) did not really provide him with a living.[30] The locally dominant Jewish atmosphere, a mixture of "mechanical political Zionism" and "imitative Germanization", neither satisfied nor accepted him. He left Tshernovits in 1911 and went on a lecture tour of Russian Poland to expound his diaspora nationalist ideas. He continued to "defend the honor of Yiddish" among Eastern European Jews[31] and to familiarize Western European Jews with its literature and folklore.[32] However, as Tshernovits receded and as the First World War drew near, it became ever clearer that his views were changing. While returning from America (in 1908) he had experienced "the presence of God", while looking out on the waters of the mid-Atlantic, but it was so momentary and fleeting an experience that he soon persuaded himself that it was but a

dream. During his lecture tour of Russian Poland he rose to comment on a lecture of another speaker and found himself proclaiming God and the Torah as the only reliable defenses that the Jewish people had. He struggled to combine "Yiddish and the absolute Jewish idea."[33] The war erupted and he foresaw the damage that it would do to the last stronghold of authentic Judaism. His three sons were drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army and two of them were sent into the thick of battle and seriously wounded. He returned to Vienna and there, in the midst of a horrible war waged on several fronts, he searched more intensely than ever before for "the absolute Jewish idea."

Notes and References*

1. Herrmann, Leo. *Nathan Birnbaum: Sein Werk und Seine Wandlung*. Berlin, Jüdischer Verlag, 1914.

2. N.B. "Die Lösungen der Judenfrage," *Ost und West*. 1902, 2, no. 6.

3. M.A. "Etwas ueber Houston Stewart Chamberlain," *Ost und West*. 1902, 2, no. 12.

4. N.B. "Ostjudische Aufgaben," *Bukowinaer Post*. (Tshernovits) 1905. (Separatdruck)

5. N.B. "Die jüdisch-nationale Bewegung," *Ruthenische Revue*. 1905, 3 no. 15.

6. Birnbaum, S.A. "Nathan Birnbaum and national autonomy," in Josef Frenkel, ed. *The Jews of Austria: Essays on their Life, History and Destruction*. London, Vallentine-Mitchell, 1970, 132-146.

7. N.B. "Jüdische Autonomie," *Ost und West*. 1906, no. 1. Also in Yiddish in the same year, in *Yidishes Vokhnblat* (Tshernovits) and in *Der Yid* (Kruke/Cracow).**

8. For views in opposition to Birnbaum's, note: (a) the Yiddish publication (in translation) of the widely read Austrian Social Democratic Party leader, Karl Kautsky, *Der kamf fun di natsyionalitetn un dos shtatsrekht in estraykh*. Vilna, Rom, 1906, in which Jews are not mentioned at all, although nationality rights are fervently espoused and (b) the pro-Polish stance of Wilhelm Feldman, detailed by Ezra Mendelsohn in his: "Jewish assimilation in L'viv: The case of Wilhelm Feldman," in A.S. Markovits and F.E. Sysyn, eds. *Nationbuilding and the Politics of Nationalism: Essays on Austrian Galicia*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press/Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1982.

9. Kann, Robert. "German-speaking Jewry during Austria-Hungary's constitutional era (1867–1918)," *Jewish Social Studies* 1948, 10, 239–256.

10. See Kahan, Yisrael. *Sefer bitshutsh*. Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1956; Tenenboym, Yoysef. *Galitsye, mayn alte heym*. Buenos Aires, Farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1952. Chapter 9, and Everett, Leila . "The rise of Jewish national politics in Galicia, 1905–1907," in A.S. Markovits and F. E. Sysyn, eds.

*N.B.: Nathan Birnbaum. M.A.: Mathias Acher, a pseudonym frequently employed by N.B. from 1895 to 1913.

**Asterisked items have been translated and included in this Volume.

Nationbuilding and the Politics of Nationalism: Essays on Austrian Galicia. Cambridge, Harvard University Press/Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1982, 149–177.

11. Agnon, Shmuel Yosef. "B'naareynu u'v'zikneynu," in his *Al kapot hamanuel.* Tel Aviv, Schocken, 1961, 273–275.

12. Brur, Yaakov. "B'naareynu u'v'zikneynu k'misgeret khayey hamekhaber," in B. Kurtsvayl, ed. *Yovel shay.* Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University, 1958. Also see details in Everett, op. cit. and Teneboym, op. cit. The latter claims that the local Polish-Galician authorities kept the results of the Bitshutsh elections secret for several days until they had burned sufficient ballots to defeat Birnbaum.

13. N.B. "Inteligents un folk," *D"r birnboyms vokhnblat.* 1908, 6.

14. N.B. "Die Emanzipation des Ostjudentums von Westjudentum (Herbst, 1909)," in his *Ausgewählte Schriften zur jüdischen Frage.* Tshernovits, 1910, vol II, 13–33.

15. N.B. "Akht oder nayn natsyionalitetn?" *Yidishes Tageblat* (New York). 1910, August 12. The "eight or nine" nationalities pertain only to Austria and do not take into account the Ladins, Slovaks or Hungarians in that part of the Monarchy.

16. N.B. "Kamf farn anerkenen di yidishe natsyon," *Der fraynd* (St. Petersburg), 1911, January 20.*

17. N.B. "An iberblik iber mayn lebn," *Yubileyum-bukh tsum zekhtsikstn geburtstog fun d"r nosn birnboym.* Warsaw, Yeshurin, 1925.

18. N. B. "Die jüdisch sprechenden Juden und ihre Bühne," *Die Welt.* 1901, 5, no. 41. In this Volume: "The Yiddish Speaking Jews and Their Stage."*

19. N.B. "Hebräisch und Jüdisch," *Ost und West.* 1902, 2, no. 7.*

20. N.B. "Die Sprachen des jüdischen Volkes," *Jüdische Abende.* 1904, no. 1.

21. Naygreshl, M. Di moderne yidishe literatur in galitsye, in his *Fun noentn over.* New York, Yidisher Kultur Kongres, 1955, 398–469. Also note the reference to his tours of Galician towns to introduce Yiddish writers in D. Sh. and M. Kleinman, "L'zekher natan birnbaum," *Davar.* 1937, May 7.

22. During this period Birnbaum also acted as chaperon-for-Yiddish in his monthly "Jüdische Abende", an insert in the *Jüdischer Volksblatt* (Vienna, 1905). The Yiddish poet Avro[he]m Reyzn, then briefly residing in Vienna, remembered the impact of the publication and of Birnbaum's monthly "evenings," at which previously published and as yet unpublished works of Yiddish literature were presented, as follows: "These evenings were attended by many hundreds of Germanized Jews, particularly by Jewish university students, and took place in one of the large and comfortable theaters in Vienna. . . . The enthusiasm that followed every recited story and poem was exceptionally great. . . . Dr. Birnbaum was the chairman and he beamed for joy. This was his triumph!" *Forverts,* 1937, May 5, no. 14399, p. 6.

23. N.B. "Die Todte 'Sprache'; Die lebende 'Nichtsprache'," *Neue Zeitung.* 1906, 1, no. 2, September 14.

24. N.B. "Für die jüdische Sprache," *Jüdische Zeitung.* 1907, 1, no. 20, November 29; also "Zum Sprachenstreit; Eine Entgegnung an Achad Haam," in his *Ausgewählte Schriften zur jüdischen Frage.* v. II, 52–74. Tshernovits, 1910.

25. N.B. Gaste in Czernowitz. *Jušdische Zeitung.* 1908, 2, September.

26. N.B. "Efenungs-rede af der konferents far der yidisher shprakh," *D"r birnboyms vokhnblat* 1908, 1, no. 1, 3-7. (*In this Volume: Opening Address at the Conference for the Yiddish Language). Before the Tshernovits conference Birnbaum had published only five articles in Yiddish (at least one of these having been translated into Yiddish for him).

27. N.B. Shtimen vegn der konferents. *D"r birnboyms vokhnblat.* 1908. no. 6, September/October. (Authorship not confirmed).

28. N.B. "Der emes," *D"r birnboyms Vokhnblat.* 1908, no. 5, September/October.

29. N.B. "Der 'zhargon'," *Gershom baders yidisher folkskalendar.* (Lemberg/L'viv). 1909. Also published in German in his *Ausquwählte Schriften zur jüdischen Frage.* v. II, 46–51. Tshernovits, 1910.

30. Zahavi-Goldhamer, "A. Tshernovits," in Y. L. Kohen-Maymon, ed. *Arim V'imohot B'yisrael.* Jerusalem, Mosad Harav Kuk, 1950. The "Young Ukrainians" opposed the local "old Ruthenians" who favored Russian rather than Ukrainian as their ethnonational language. See Paul R. Magocsi. *The Shaping of a National Identity.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 1978, p. 82. According to Tenenboym (op. cit.), Ukrainians had not only supported Birnbaum's candidacy in Bitshutsh but the entire notion of nationalistically oriented Jewish candidates to the election of 1907. The two journals that Birnbaum edited/published during his three years in Tshernovits (*D"r birnboyms vokhnblat,* in Yiddish, and *Das Volk,* in German) have been little studied due to their unavailability even in most of the largest Judaica collections. This may explain why the brief discussion of Birnbaum's Yiddish periodical in Flinker, D. et al. *The Jewish Press That Was* (Tel Aviv, World Federation of Jewish Journalists, 1980) is factually a comedy of errors.

31. N.B. *Der yikhes fun yidish.* Berlin, Sh. Lifshits Publishing House, 1913 (=*Naye bibliotek far yidishe fragn,* no.1).

32. M. A. "Auf dem Volksliederabend von Ost und West," *Ost und West.* 1912, 12, no. 1, 17-24.

33. N.B. "Di absolute ideye fun yidntum un di yidishe shprakh," *Di yidishe velt.* St. Petersburg, 1912, March.*

Chapter 4

The Role of the Tshernovits Language Conference in the "Rise of Yiddish"

THE "SPREAD OF LANGUAGE" does not always entail gaining new speakers or users—whether as a first or as a second language. Frequently it entails gaining new functions or uses, particularly "H" functions (i.e., literacy-related functions in education, religion, "high culture" in general, and, in modern times, in econo-technology and government, too) for a language that is already widely known and used in "L" functions (i.e., everyday family, neighborhood, and other informal/intimate, intragroup interaction). Wherever a speech community already has a literacy-related elite, this type of language spread inevitably involves the displacement of an old elite (the one that is functionally associated with the erstwhile "H") by a new elite that is seeking a variety of social changes which are to be functionally associated with the prior "L" and which are to be instituted and maintained under its own (the new elite's) leadership.[1] The last century has witnessed the rise and fall (but not the complete elimination) of such efforts on behalf of Yiddish.

The traditional position of Yiddish in *Ashkenaz* (the traditional Hebrew-Aramaic and Yiddish designation for Central and Eastern

Europe, Jews living in or deriving from this area being known, therefore, as *Ashkenazim*) was—and in many relatively unmodernized Orthodox circles still is—somewhat more complex than the H versus L distinction usually implies. At the extreme of sanctity there was *loshn koydesh*[2] alone, realized in hallowed biblical and postbiblical texts. At the opposite extreme, that of workaday intragroup life, there was Yiddish alone: the vernacular of one and all, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, pious and less than pious, with some members of each pair engaging in a growing modicum of Yiddish "entertainment" reading as well. Although "sanctity" and "workaday" existed on a single continuum and were connected by a single overarching set of cultural values and assumptions, they were, nevertheless, distinct, overt cognitive and emotional opposites. In between these two extremes were numerous situations in which (a) *loshn koydesh* and Yiddish co-occurred insofar as intragroup life was concerned, and less numerous ones in which (b) coterritorial vernaculars or written languages were employed insofar as intergroup activities involving the worksphere, government and infrequent "socializing" required.

The traditional intragroup intermediate zone resulted in a Yiddish oral literature of high moral import and public recognition (sometimes published in Yiddish but, at least initially, as often as not, translated into *loshn koydesh* for the very purpose of "dignified" publication). It also included the exclusive use of Yiddish as the process language of oral study, from the most elementary to the most advanced and recondite levels. And it included the exclusive use of Yiddish as the language of countless sermons by rabbis and preachers and as the language of popular religious tracts (ostensibly for women and uneducated menfolk). Thus, Yiddish did enter pervasively into the pale of sanctity and even into the pale of sanctity-in-print (hallowed bilingual texts—*loshn koydesh* originals with accompanying Yiddish translations—had existed ever since the appearance of print and, before that, as incunabula, but it never existed in that domain as a fully free agent, never as the sole medium of that domain in its most hallowed and most textified realizations, never as a fully independent target medium but only as a process medium underlying which or superceding

which a single *loshn koydesh* text or a whole sea of such texts was either known, assumed, or created (Fishman 1975).

As a result, when traditional Eastern European Jewry enters significantly into the nineteenth century drama of modernization, *loshn koydesh* and Yiddish are generally conceptualized, both by most intellectuals and by rank-and-file members of Ashkenaz, in terms of their extreme and discontinuous textified versus vernacular roles, their shared zones having contributed neither to the substantial vernacularization of *loshn koydesh* nor to the phenomenological sanctification of Yiddish. As the nineteenth century progressed there were increasing efforts to liberate Yiddish from its apparent subjugation to *loshn koydesh* (the latter being metaphorically referred to as the 'noble daughter of heaven', Yiddish being no more than her 'handmaiden'), particularly for more modern intragroup H pursuits. In addition, there were also increasing efforts to liberate Yiddish from its inferior position vis-à-vis coterritorial vernaculars in connection with modern learning and nontraditional life more generally. It is with the former type of language spread that this paper deals most directly (and with its implications for the role of *loshn koydesh*, which was also then being groomed for modern H roles at the intragroup and at the intergroup levels), although the spill-over from the former to the latter type of language spread was often both an objective and an achievement as well. Obviously, when one component of a traditional diglossia (here: triglossia) situation changes in its functions, the societal allocation of functions with respect to the other(s) is under stress to change as well.

The Tshernovits Language Conference: Success or Failure?

Three different positive views concerning Yiddish were clearly evident by the first decade of the twentieth century, and a fourth was then increasingly coming into being.[3] The earliest view was a traditional utilitarian one, and it continues to be evinced primarily by ultra-Orthodox spokesmen to this very day. In accord with this view, Yiddish was (and is) to be utilized in print for various moralistic and *halakhic*[4] educational purposes, because it has long been used in this way, particularly in publications for

women, the uneducated and children. Any departure from such use—whether on behalf of modern Hebrew or a coterritorial vernacular—was and is decried as disruptive of tradition. Another view was a modern utilitarian one, namely, that Yiddish must be used in political and social education if the masses were ever to be moved toward more modern attitudes and behaviors, because it was the only language that they understood. This view was, and is, to some extent, still widely held by *maskilic*[5] and Zionist/socialist spokesmen. A third view was also evident by the turn of the century, namely that Yiddish was a distinctly indigenous and representative vehicle and, therefore, it had a natural role to play both in expressing and in symbolizing Jewish cultural-national desiderata. Finally, we begin to find the view expressed that for modern Jewish needs, Yiddish is the *only or major* natural expressive and symbolic vehicle.

In the nineteenth century the first two positive views (and the counterclaims related to them) were encountered most frequently, but the latter two were beginning to be expressed as well (see, particularly J.M. Lifshits's writings, e.g., 1863, 1867; note D.E. Fishman's discussion [1986] of Lifshits as transitional ideologist). In the twentieth century the latter two views (and their respective refutations) came into prominence and the former two receded and were ultimately almost abandoned.[6] The last public encounter of all four views was at the Tshernovits Language Conference. There the first two views were presented and strongly refuted whereas the last two remained in uneasy balance, neither of them appearing clearly victorious over the other.

Planning the Conference

As we have noted in Chapter 3, the father of the idea of convening an international conference on behalf of Yiddish was Nathan Birnbaum.[7] He had first broached the idea in a 1905 lecture in Tshernovits,[8] well before he ran for a seat in the Austro-Hungarian parliament in 1907. Upon his defeat he decided to relocate from Vienna to Tshernovits, where he had many followers and admirers (particularly among university students

whom he had met and influenced in Vienna but who hailed from Tshernovits). However, although he founded both a Yiddish weekly (*Dokter birnboyms vokhnblat*) and a German monthly (*Das Volk*) there, Tshernovits could provide him neither with visibility nor with the income that he required. Accordingly, he decided to visit the United States in pursuit of both and on behalf of Yiddish "the world language of a world people". It was among Yiddish writers and intellectuals in New York, the capital of Eastern European immigrant life in the New World, that he secured the first noteworthy moral support for his plans to convene The First World Conference for the Yiddish Language. Since Tshernovits was the town where Birnbaum lived and where he could most conveniently supervise the practical arrangements for such a conference, that is the town in which it was agreed that it would take place. This decision, as we will see, had other practical justifications as well as definite consequences for the conference itself.

Birnbaum's initial host in the United States was the socialist-Zionist Doved Pinski, already well known as a Yiddish novelist and dramatist, who had read Birnboym's articles in German and was eager to help him reach a wider pro-Yiddish audience. Immediately attracted to Birnbaum's cause was the socialist-territorialist[9] theoretician and philosopher Khayem Zhitlovski (for extensive bibliographic details, see Fishman 1981). The three of them formed a curious troika (a neo-traditionalist on his way back to full-fledged Orthodoxy, a labor-Zionist, and a philosophical secularist), but together they issued a resolution for a world conference concerning Yiddish, composed in Pinski's apartment on Beck Street in the South Bronx (also signed by the playwright Yankev Gordon and the publisher Alex Yevalenko), and together they brought it to a massive audience at two "evenings" (Yiddish: *ovntn*, although not necessarily transpiring in the evening) the larger of which took place in Webster Hall, on the Lower East Side. Far more unforgettable than the arguments that they then marshalled for such a conference, and more impressive than the proposed order of business suggested in connection with it, was the fact that its chief architect, Birnbaum, spoke to the audiences in German (for he could not yet speak standard or formal Yiddish,

although he had begun to write Yiddish articles in 1904). His addresses, although purposely peppered with Yiddishisms, struck most commentators as impressive but funny, funny but painful. The intelligentsia was learning its mother tongue so that the latter could fulfill new functions and thereby provide new statutes to masses and intelligentsia alike.

But there was an intended "order of business" for Tshernovits, no matter how much it may have been overlooked at the *ovntn* or even at the conference itself. Birnbaum, Zhitlovski, and Pinski agreed (primarily at the latter's insistence) to "avoid politics" and "resolutions on behalf of Yiddish" (Pinski 1948), particularly since the political and ideological context of Yiddish differed greatly in Czarist Russia, in Hapsburg Austro-Hungary and in the immigrant United States. Thus they agreed upon a "practical agenda" and a "working conference" devoted to the following ten points:

1. Yiddish spelling
2. Yiddish grammar
3. Foreign words and new words
4. A Yiddish dictionary
5. Jewish youth and the Yiddish language
6. The Yiddish press
7. The Yiddish theatre and Yiddish actors
8. The economic status of Yiddish writers
9. The economic status of Yiddish actors
10. Recognition for the Yiddish language

The agenda starts off with four items of corpus planning.[10] Yiddish was correctly seen as being in need of authoritative codification and elaboration in order to standardize its usage and systematize its future growth. Major corpus-planning efforts for Yiddish—though previously called for and attempted—were a sign of its new importance. Point five recognized the dangers that modernization represented for the ethnic identity of the younger

generation, particularly if it pursued education and advancement in coterritorial vernaculars to the exclusion of Yiddish. Points six to nine stressed press and theater—their quality and their economic viability—the massive means of bringing modern Yiddish creativity to the public. Finally, the last point recognized something that was certainly on Birnbaum's mind. Jews themselves—not to speak of Gentiles—were unaccustomed to granting recognition to Yiddish, and, therefore, such recognition was often begrudged it even by democratic or democratizing regimes that gave some consideration to cultural autonomy for minority nationalities or to officially recognized cultural pluralism (as did pre-World War I Austro-Hungary). As Pinski in particular feared, the entire agenda of the conference was "subverted" by the tenth point and, indeed, was dominated by what was in reality only half of that point: Jewish recognition for Yiddish.

Why Was the Conference Held in Tshernovits?

Tshernovits was only a modest-sized town (21,500 Jews out of a total population of 68,400) and of no particular importance vis-à-vis Jewish cultural, political, or economic development. It was clearly overshadowed by Varshe, Vilne, Odes (Warsaw, Vilna, Odessa) and several other urban centers in the Pale of Settlement within the Czarist empire. Nevertheless, the recent history of Czarist repressions may have made it undesirable (if no longer clearly impossible) to convene the conference in one of those centers. Even within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, however, such Jewish centers as Kruke (Cracow), Lemberik/Lemberg (Lvov), and Brod (Brodie) were clearly of greater importance than Tshernovits. Tshernovits was, of course, easily accessible to Yiddish speakers in Austro-Hungary and Czarist Russia, but its symbolic significance far surpassed its national convenience and was twofold: (a) Not only was it in *frants-yosefs medine* (the Austro-Hungarian monarchy) but many segments of its hitherto significantly Germanized Jewish intelligentsia were already struggling to revise their attitudes towards Yiddish—a struggle that was particularly crucial for that period in Austro-Hungarian cultural politics vis-à-vis Germans, Poles, Ukrainians/Ruthenians,

and Jews in Bukovina and in Galicia as well—and (b) Birnbaum had already relocated there and had several young followers there (many of whom were students at the university in Vienna during the school year—and had been influenced by Birnbaum there). These young followers could provide (on a volunteer basis and during the summer vacation period in particular) the technical/organizational underpinnings of a world conference for Yiddish. Indeed, these followers constituted, with Birnbaum, the organizational committee that sent out the invitations to individual organizations and committees, secured a hall (not without difficulty), planned a banquet and literary evening, and disbursed the meager fees that the participants in the Conference paid in order to be either delegates (5 Kronen) or guests (1 Kronen). Both of these factors (the convening of the Conference in Tshernovits, and Birnbaum's young and inexperienced followers there, in the grips of their own discovery of H-possibilities for Yiddish), influenced the course of the Conference. The delicate balance of minority relations in Galicia and Bukovina resulted in more widespread attention being paid to the first Yiddish World Conference than its sponsors had bargained for. The census of 1910 was already being discussed, and it was apparent that the authorities again wanted Jews to claim either Polish (in Galicia) or German (in Bukovina) as mother tongue (as had been done in 1890) in order to defuse or counterbalance the growing pressure from Ukrainian/Ruthenians and Rumanians for additional language privileges and parliamentary representation. Previously, Jews had been counted upon to buttress the establishment out of fear that "unrest" would lead to anti-Jewish developments of one kind or another. It was apparent that young Jews were disinclined to play this role any longer and that they were threatening to claim either Yiddish or Hebrew, even though neither was on the approved list of mother tongues and even though claiming a language not on the list was "a punishable offense." Indeed, so great was the tension concerning the Conference that the President of the Jewish Community (*kehile*) in Tshernovits refused to permit the Conference to meet in community facilities for fear of incurring official displeasure or worse. Clearly, a new within-fold status for Yiddish would have

intergroup repercussions as well: upsetting the former within-group diglossia system was also related to new intergroup aspirations and these were, of necessity, political and economic (or likely to be suspected of being such), rather than merely cultural (no matter what the official agenda of the Conference might be).

Moreover, meeting in Tshernovits also determined the very nature of the quests and delegates (a distinction that was soon ignored) that could attend, discuss, propose, vote upon, and ultimately implement the Conference's deliberations and resolutions. The regional tensions in conjunction with national/cultural rights resulted in attendance by a more substantial number of students and ordinary folk, many in search of something spectacular or even explosive, than might otherwise have been the case. Similarly, because of the characteristics of Bukovinian Jewry *per se* there were more Zionists and fewer Bundists,[12] more traditionally-religiously oriented and fewer proletarian-politically oriented delegates and guests than would have been the case elsewhere. Birnbaum's youthful admirers and assistants were quite incapable of rectifying this imbalance by such simple means as sending more invitations to more "ethno-nationally conscious" circles. Indeed, for them, as for most Jewish intellectuals in Tshernovits, the idea of a Conference on behalf of Yiddish and conducted in Yiddish was not quite believable even as it materialized. Most local Jewish intellectuals were "the mainstay of . . . *daytshtum* (Germanness), and of a sui generis *daytshtum* to boot, Bukovinian *daytshtum*. None of the socially and politically active local (Jewish) intellectuals imagined anything like speaking to the people in its language. Indeed, when Berl Loker, who belonged to the exceptions, then a young student, was about to give a lecture in Yiddish, he invited my wife to attend as follows: 'Come and you will hear how one speaks pure Yiddish at a meeting!' The best recommendation for a speaker was the accomplishment of being able to speak to a crowd in lovely and ornate German" (Vays 1937). Thus, the lingering disbelief that Yiddish was suitable for H pursuits ("Is Yiddish a language?") surrounded the Conference and even found its way into the Conference, and did so in Tshernovits more than it would have in many other, more industrialized and proletarianized centers of Jewish urban

concentration and modernization. Bukovinian Jewry and its modernizing elites were then both still relatively untouched by the more sophisticated pro- and anti-Yiddish sentiments that were at a much higher pitch in Warsaw, Vilna, Lodz, or Odessa.

Who Attended the Conference?

The invitations sent by Birnbaum's "secretariat" were addressed to those organizations and committees whose addresses they happened to have. Many unimportant societies and clubs were invited, whereas many even more important ones were not. Personal invitations were few and far between. The writer and essayist Y. L. Perets (Warsaw, 1852–1915), perhaps the major influence upon the younger generation of Yiddish writers and a conscious ideologist of synthesis among all Jewish values and symbols, modern and traditional, was invited and came with his wife (with whom he spoke more Polish than Yiddish). The two other "classicists of modern Yiddish literature," Sholem Aleykhem (1859–1910) and Mendele Moykher Sforem (1836–1917), were also invited but did not come. Sholem Aleykhem at least claimed to be ill; but Mendele, in his seventies, offered no excuse at all, and, as a result, was sent no greetings by the Conference such as were sent to Sholem Aleykhem. Zhitlovski came, but Pinski was "busy writing a book" (Pinski 1948). A young linguist, Matesyohu Mizes (Mathias Mieses), was invited (as were two other linguistic-oriented students, Ayzenshtat and Sotek) to address the Conference on the linguistic issues that apparently constituted forty percent of its agenda. Other than the above individual invitations, a general invitation was issued and broadcast via the Yiddish press and by word of mouth "to all friends of Yiddish." All in all, some seventy showed up and these were characterized by one participant (and later major critic) as having only one thing in common: "They could afford the fare . . . Everyone was his own master, without any sense of responsibility to others." (E[ste]r 1908).

The geographic imbalance among the resulting participants is quite clear:

From the Czarist empire: 14. Among this delegation were

found the most prestigious participants: Perets, Sholem Asch (still young but already a rising star), Avrom Reyzn (a well-known and much beloved poet), H. D. Nomberg (writer and journalist, later a deputy in the Polish Sejm and founder of a small political party, *yidishe folkistishe partey*, stressing Yiddish and diaspora cultural autonomy), N. Prilutski (linguist, folklorist, journalist; later a Sejm deputy), Ester (Bundist, later a Communist *Kombund* and *Yevsektsiya* leader). Zhitlovski (though coming from the United States) and Ayznshtat (though then studying in Bern) were also usually counted with the "Russians".

From Rumania: 1. I. Sotek of Braila (an advocate of writing Yiddish with Latin characters and a student of Slavic elements in Yiddish).

From Galicia and Bukovina: 55. Among these were eight minor literary figures and forty-seven students, merchants, bookkeepers, craftsmen, etc., including one "wedding entertainer" (*badkhn*). This group was the least disciplined and, on its home territory, least impressed and convinced by attempts to keep to any agenda.

> At the most crucial votes no more than forty members participated . . . In the vote on the resolution that Yiddish be considered an ethnonational [Jewish] language no more than 36 individuals participated. People were always arriving late to sessions. Some did not know what they were voting about. People voted and contradicted their own previous votes. In addition, it was always noisy due to the booing and the applauding of "guests from Tshernovits". No one at all listened to Ayznshtat's paper on Yiddish spelling. (E[ste]r 1908).

Nor were the banquet or the literary program any more orderly or consensual. When local Jewish workers arrived to attend the banquet

> it was discovered that they lacked black jackets and they were not admitted. They began to complain. Some of the more decently clad ones were selected and admitted without jackets. Some of the "indecently" clad workers took umbrage and protested so long that the policeman took pity on them and sent them away. As a result, the "decently" clad ones also decided to leave. After the opening remarks, I called everyone's attention to what had occurred. It immediately became noisy and I was told to stop speaking. I left the banquet and a few others accompanied me. (E[ste]r 1908)

Attracting an elite to modern H functions for an erstwhile traditional L runs into problems due to the fact that prior and concurrent social issues have established allegiances and identities that are not congruent with those that further the interests of the new elite and the new functions. Reformulation of identities and regrouping of allegiances is called for and is difficult for all concerned.

The Conference *Per Se*

The Conference began on Sunday, August 30, 1908, and lasted for a little under a week.

> A quarter after ten in the morning there walked onto the stage Nosn Birnboym in the company of Y. L. Perets, S. Ash, Dr. Kh. Zhitlovski and other distinguished guests . . . Dr. N. Birnboym opens the Conference reading his first speech in Yiddish fluently from his notes . . . He reads his speech in the Galician dialect. (*Rasvet*, September 1908: quoted from *Afn shvel* 1968)

Birnbaum stressed the fact that this was the first world-wide effort on behalf of Yiddish, sponsored by its greatest writers ("respected even by the opponents of Yiddish") and the beginning of a long chain of efforts yet to come. These opening remarks caused a sensation among local Tshernovitsians.

> Everyone knew that he [Birnbaum] doesn't speak Yiddish and that the speech would be translated from German. However, all were eager to hear how the "coarse" words would sound coming from the mouth of Dr. Birnbaum who was known as an excellent German speaker . . . However at the festive banquet in honor of the esteemed guests . . . he spoke superbly in German, the way only he could. (Vays 1937)

Indeed, a speaker's ability to speak Yiddish well and the very fact that Yiddish could be spoken as befitted a world conference, i.e., in a cultivated, learned, disciplined fashion in conjunction with modern concerns, never ceased to impress those who had never before heard it so spoken.

> Zhitlovski made the greatest impression on all the delegates and guests, both at the Conference and at the banquet (which was a great event for Yiddish culture that was still so unknown to most of those in attendance). "That kind of Yiddish is more beautiful than French!" was a comment heard from all quarters and particularly from circles that had hitherto rejected Yiddish from a "purely esthetic" point of view (Vays 1937)[13].

Yiddish used adeptly in an H function was itself a triumph for Tshernovits, almost regardless of what was said.

But of course a great deal was said substantively as well. The linguistic issues were "covered" by Ayznshtat, Sotek, and Mizes. Whereas the first two were roundly ignored, the third caused a storm of protests when, in the midst of a paper on fusion languages and their hybrid-like strength, creativity, and vigor, he also attacked *loshn koydesh* for being dead, stultifying, and decaying. Only Perets's intervention saved Mizes's paper for the record as "the first scientific paper in Yiddish on Yiddish" (Anon. 1931).[14] Obviously, the tenth agenda item stubbornly refused to wait its place in line and constantly came to the fore in the form of an increasingly growing antagonism between those (primarily Bundists) who wanted to declare Yiddish as *the* ethnonational Jewish language (Hebrew/*loshn koydesh*—being a classical tongue rather than a mother tongue—could not, in their view, qualify as such) and those (primarily Zionists and traditionalists) who, at best, would go no further than to declare Yiddish as *an* ethnonational Jewish language, so that the role of Hebrew/*loshn koydesh*—past, present and future—would remain unsullied.[15] In the midst of this fundamental argument, more primitive views still surfaced as a result of the presence of so many ideologically unmodernized guests. One of the delegates recounts the following tale:

> ...(T)here suddenly appears on the stage a man with a long, red beard, wearing a traditional black *kapote* (kaftan) and *yarmelke* (skull-cap). He begins speaking by saying "I will tell you a story." The hall is full of quiet expectancy. We all listened carefully in order to hear a good, folksy anecdote. The man recounts in great detail a story about how two Jews once sued each other in court because of a *shoyfer* (ritual ram's horn) that had been stolen from the *beys-medresh* (house of study and prayer). With great difficulty they explained to the gentile judge what a *shoyfer* is. Finally the judge asked: "In one word—a trumpet?" At this point the litigants shuddered and one shouted to the other: "I ask you: is a *shoyfer* a trumpet?" The assembled participants in the hall were ready to smile at this "anecdote" which had long been well known, when the man suddenly began to shout at the top of his lungs: "You keep on talking about language, but is Yiddish (*zhargon*) a language?" (Kisman 1958)

The compromise formulation penned by Nomberg ("*an* ethnonational Jewish language") was finally adopted, thanks only to the insistence of Perets, Birnbaum, and Zhitlovski, and over the vociferous opposition of both left-wing and right-wing extremists who either favored an exclusive role for Yiddish ("*the* ethnonational Jewish language") or who wanted no resolutions at all on political topics.[16]

Very little time was devoted to organizational or implementational issues such as whether the Conference itself should sponsor "cultural work," convene a second conference within a reasonable time, or even establish a permanent office (secretariat) and membership organization. Although the last two recommendations were adopted (the first was rejected due to unified left-wing and right-wing disenchantment with the Conference's stance regarding the "*the* or *an*" ethnonational language issue), and although Birnbaum and two young assistants were elected to be the executive officers and to establish a central office, very little was actually done along these lines. At any rate, the tasks entrusted to the secretariat were minimal and innocuous ones indeed. In addition, Birnbaum soon moved ever-closer to unreconstructed Orthodoxy and to its stress on matters "above and beyond language". At any rate, he was not an administrator/executive but an ideologue. He was, as always, penniless, and the funds that were required for an office and for his salary never materialized. Zhitlovski returned to America and threw himself into efforts there to start Yiddish supplementary schools and to restrain Jewish socialists from sacrificing their own Jewishness and the Jewish people as a whole on the altar of Americanization disguised as proletarian brotherhood. Perets did undertake one fund-raising trip to St. Petersburg where Shimen Dubnov (1860–1941), the distinguished historian and ideologist of cultural autonomy in the diaspora and himself a recent convert to the value

of Yiddish, had convened a small group of wealthy but Russified potential donors. The latter greeted Perets with such cold cynicism that he "told them off" ("our salvation will come from the poor but warm-hearted Jews of the Pale rather than from the rich but cold-hearted Jews of St. Petersburg") and "slammed the door". Thus, for various reasons, no office was ever really established in Tshernovits and even the minutes of the Conference remained unpublished. Although S. A. Birnbaum helped prepare them for publication by editing out as many Germanisms as possible, they were subsequently misplaced or lost and had to be reconstructed more than two decades later from press clippings and memoirs (Anon. 1931).

Intellectuals (and even an intelligentsia) alone can rarely establish a movement. Intellectuals can reify language and react to it as a powerful symbol, as the bearer and actualizer of cultural values, behaviors, traditions, goals. However, for an L to spread into H functions, more concrete considerations (jobs, funds, influence, status, control, power) are involved. Only the Yiddishist left wing had in mind an economic, political, and cultural revolution that would have placed Yiddish on top. But that left did not even control the Tshernovits Conference, to say nothing of the hard, cruel world that surrounded it.

American Reactions to the Tshernovits Conference

The increasingly democratic, culturally pluralistic, and culturally autonomistic prewar Austro-Hungarian monarchy was the model toward which mankind was moving insofar as the leading figures at Tshernovits were concerned. One of the areas of Jewish concentration in which this model did not prevail—and where the very concept of a symbolically unified, modernized, world-wide Jewish nationality with a stable, all-purpose vernacular of its own was least understood, accepted, and actualized—was the United States. No wonder then that the Tshernovits Conference was generally accorded a cool reception here and even a derisive one.[17] The idea of teaching people how to spell or write or speak Yiddish "correctly" was viewed by one journalist as being no less ridiculous than the idea of teaching

people to laugh correctly, grammatically (Sambatyen, "A falsher gelekhter, gor on gramatik," *Yidishes Tageblat*,[18] Sept. 1, 1908). The *Tageblat* was an Orthodox-oriented paper, and in its editorials before and after the Conference it stressed that *loshn koydesh* alone was of value for Jewishness while English (or other coterritorial vernaculars elsewhere) met all of the general and citizenship needs that Jews might have. To elevate Yiddish to H functions was not only ridiculous but blasphemous.

> If the resolutions of the Conference declare . . . that all of Jewishness will be found in Ash's drama "God of Vengeance" and in Perets' "Shtrayml" . . . will anyone care? Our people decided long ago that we are a nationality and that our ethnonational language is none other than that in which the spirit of the Jewish people developed . . . the language in which the Bible is written, the Book that has made us immortal. (Sept. 29, 1908)

If the Orthodox-bourgeois *Tageblat* was unfriendly toward the Conference, to say the least, the secular-socialist *Forverts* (still publishing to this day) was almost every bit as much so. Its correspondent Moris Roznfeld (a famous Yiddish laborite-poet in his own right) wrote from Galicia just a few days before the Conference opened,

> I know that with just a few exceptions there is not much interest in America in this Tshernovits Conference and for many reasons. First of all, most believe that nothing practical will come of it. Secondly, the American Yiddish writer, as well as the Yiddish reader, is not terribly interested in rules of grammar. What difference does it make whether one writes גיין, געהן or גיין [all pronounced geyn/gayn depending on speaker's regional dialect], יוד, אידן, יוד or even אַחוּרי [the first three pronounced id/yid and the last—utilized only ironically/contrastively in Yiddish—Yahudi, and, therefore not really an orthographic variant in a continuum with the first three], as long as it can be read and understood? . . . Among the majority of even our good writers, Yiddish is regarded merely as a ferry that leads to the other side, to the language of the land, which each of us must learn in the land in which he finds himself.
>
> But these views, objectively and impartially stated, apply only to America. Here, in Galicia, they are more than merely grammatical issues. Here it is a political issue, an issue of life itself . . .
>
> . . . If it were to be officially decided that *loshn koydesh* is the Jewish language, then the Jewish masses would lose their power and their

> vernacular would be ignored. Only the Jewish snobs, the aristocratic, "let-them-eat-cake" idealists, would gain thereby. Therefore, the eyes of the real friends of the people and of the friends of the workers in Galicia and even in Russia are turned toward Tshernovits. Therefore the Conference there has major, historical importance. I don't know from what point of view the Conference will treat the language issue . . . The Conference might even be of an academic, theoretical nature. . . . Nevertheless, the Conference will have strong reverberations on Jewish politics in Galicia.

Note Roznfeld's total disinterest in either the linguistic portion or in any portion of the Tshernovits agenda as being valid for Americans. In 1908 few American Yiddish writers, few even of the secular laborites among them, aspired to H functions for Yiddish. In their eyes Jews, as workers, were destined to be part of the greater American proletariat; and English would, therefore, be its language for higher social purposes, and, ultimately, its brotherly interethnic vernacular as well. The Bund's 1950 Declaration, and its advocacy of Jewish cultural autonomy in Eastern Europe, with Yiddish as the ethnonational language of the Jewish proletariat, was considered, at best, to be a politically relevant platform for Eastern European Jewry alone, but one that was irrelevant for those who had immigrated to "the Golden Land." Thus, if neither the linguistic nor the political potentialities of the Conference applied here, then the Conference as a whole was merely a distant echo, and either a somewhat funny one or a clearly sacrilegious one at that. If it was difficult to assign H functions to Yiddish in its very own massive heartland, where its stability was less threatened (so it seemed) and where all agreed as to its utility, how much more difficult was it to do so in immigrant-America where its transitionality was assumed by secularists and traditionalists alike?

Eastern European Reactions to the Conference

If the brunt of American commentary on the Conference was negative, that in Eastern Europe was initially equally or even more so, and on three grounds. As expected, the Hebraist and extreme-Zionist reaction was unrelentingly hostile. In their eyes Yiddish was a language that demoted Jewry from its incomparable classical heights to the superficiality and vacuousness of such illiterate peasant tongues as Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Rumanian, etc. To foster Yiddish struck J. Klausner, I. Epshteyn, and many other Hebraists as being laughable, if it were not so sad, an exercise in self-impoverishment and self-debasement. A considerable number of those who shared their view urged that a massive counter-conference be convened (and, indeed, the First World Conference for the Hebrew Language was convened in Berlin in 1910) and that an even more massive propaganda campaign be launched to attack Tshernovits and its infamous resolution. However, the veteran Hebraist and philosopher Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927) argued vehemently against such efforts, on the grounds that they would give Tshernovits more visibility than it could ever attain on its own. According to Ahad Ha'am, the Jewish people had already experienced two great philosophical disasters in the diaspora: Christianity and Hasidism.[19] Both of these had mushroomed precisely because Jews themselves had paid too much attention to them by dignifying them with unnecessary commentary. This sad lesson should not be applied to Tshernovits and to Yiddishism as a whole. They were *muktse makhmes miyes* [mukẓa maḥamat mi'us], loathsomely ugly, and the less said about them the better.

If the right-wing opposition generally elected to counter Tshernovits with a wall of silence, the left-wing opposition apparently decided to drown it in a sea of words. From their point of view Tshernovits had been a "sell out" on the part of those who were willing to water down, render tepid, and weaken the position vis-à-vis Yiddish of "the broad folk-masses" and "the Jewish proletariat," in order to curry favor among the bourgeoisie, by adopting an uninspired and uninspiring "all Israel are brothers" approach. The modern, secular, socialist sector of the Jewish people, "the revolutionary and nationality-building sector," had, by then, already surpassed the meager goals and the lukewarm resolutions of Tshernovits. They, therefore, refused to be compromised and whittled down by a conference that was "an episode instead of a happening" (Kazhdan 1928), and whose resolution was no more than "a harmful illusion" (Zilberfarb 1928) and "a mistake that must not be reiterated" (Khmurner 1928).

> The Tshernovits Conference was converted into the opposite of what its initiators had projected. Its isolation from the Jewish labor movement took its revenge upon the Conference . . . The great masters of Yiddish literature did not possess the magic to convert the Jewish middle class and the bourgeois intellectuals into co-combatants and partners with the Jewish workers in the latter's great national role of limitless loyalty to the Yiddish language. Yiddish cultural life, therefore, far surpassed the Tshernovits Conference . . . Neither at the Teachers' Conference in Vilna, nor at the organizational Convention of the Central Yiddish School Organization (Tsisho), nor at the Tsisho-Convention of 1925 where the founding of the Yivo [Yiddish Scientific Institute; today: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research] was proclaimed, nor at any of the many other [Yiddish] teachers' conferences in Poland was there even a word spoken about the Tshernovits Conference . . . Today, 60 years after Tshernovits, we know: Tshernovits was not destined to have any heirs. . . . There was really nothing to inherit. (Kazhdan 1969)

Even now, over four decades after the Holocaust—when most commentators tend to wax lyrical about Jewish Eastern Europe and to remember it in somewhat rosy terms—there remain Bundist leaders who remember Tshernovits only as a flubbed opportunity.

Even those who were quite satisfied with Tshernovits in symbolic terms soon realized that it was a fiasco in any practical organizational terms. As soon as the First World War was over and, indeed, in the very midst of the War in anticipation of its conclusion), various Yiddish writers and cultural spokesmen began to call for "a world conference for Yiddish culture as a result of purely practical rather than demonstrative and declarative goals. We have outgrown the period of mere demonstrations and theoretical debates. There is much work to be done!" (Sh. N[iger]. 1922). Zhitlovski himself called for "an organization to openly unfurl the flag on which it will be clearly written: Yiddish, our ethnonational language, our only unity and freedom . . . a 'Yiddishist' organization with the openly unfurled flag of our cultural liberation and ethnonational unity" (1928). Others repeatedly reinforced and repeated this view (e.g., Lehrer 1928, Mark 1968, Zelitsh 1968). As a result, most subsequent major nonpartisan or suprapartisan international efforts to organize Yiddish cultural efforts more effectively have viewed themselves

as the instrumental heirs of the Tshernovits Conference (e.g., YIKUF-Yidisher kultur farband 1937; Yidisher kultur kongres 1948; Yerushelayemer velt konferents far yidish un yidisher kultur 1976). Clearly, however, the realities facing Yiddish after World War I were far different from those that Tshernovits assumed. The multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian monarchy had been split into several smaller states, each jealously protective of its particular ethnonational (state-building) language and quick to set aside the Trianon and Versailles guarantees to Yiddish (Tenenboym 1957/58). The former Czarist "Pale of Settlement" was either in the same situation as the foregoing (insofar as Poland and the Baltic states were concerned) or, ultimately, under even more powerful Russificatory control than before (in White Russia and in the Ukraine). Despite Bundist grievances, a good part of the spirit of Tshernovits lived for two postwar decades in the Yiddish schools, youth clubs, theaters, and cultural organizations of Poland, Lithuania, and Rumania, and, despite Communist attacks, in their regulated counterparts in the USSR. However, just prior to the Second World War, the former were economically starved and politically battered (Eisenstein 1949, Tartakover 1946), whereas the latter were being discontinued under duress of Russification fears and pressures (Choseed 1968). After the Second World War, Jewish Eastern Europe was no more. It became incumbent on Yiddish devotees in the United States and in Israel, i.e., in two locales where Yiddish was originally not expected to benefit from the spirit of Tshernovits, to defend it, if possible.

Reevaluating the Tshernovits Conference: Shadow or Substance?

Notwithstanding Kazhdan's lingering negative evaluation in 1968, distance has made the heart grow fonder insofar as the majority of commentators is concerned. Those few who initially held that the symbolism of Tshernovits had been substantial, i.e., that it had raised Yiddish to the status of an honorific co-symbol, regardless of what its practical shortcomings might have been (for example: Mayzl 1928, Prilutski 1928, Pludermakher 1928), finally carried the day. The views that are encountered today in

Yiddishist circles are very much like those that began to be heard when the first commemorative celebrations in honor of Tshernovits were organized in 1928. (In September 1918 the First World War had technically not yet ended and celebrations were presumably not possible.) "Yes, Yiddishism is a young movement, but it is not all that poor in traditions. One of the loveliest traditions of Yiddishism is the memory of the Tshernovits Conference. No memoirs, pedantry or arguments can darken the glow of that bright cultural dawn's early light that is known by the name: The Tshernovits Conference of 1908" (Pludermakher 1928). Perhaps it was and perhaps it wasn't necessary to compromise in connection with the crucial resolution. In either case, no one was fooled by the compromise. "The Tshernovits Conference was recorded on the morrow immediately after the last session as the Yiddishist revolt—and that is the only way in which the opponents of the Yiddish language could regard it" (Prilutski 1928), for even to claim H co-functions alongside of Hebrew/*loshn koydesh* was a devastating rejection of what these opponents were aiming at. As a result, Tshernovits deserved to be viewed as "the first mobilization" (Mayzl 1928) on behalf of Yiddish.

More than seventy-five years after Tshernovits, Yiddishist opinion with respect to it is, if anything, even mellower. Living as they do with the constant if quiet anxiety produced by the continual attrition of Yiddish, Yiddishists have come to view Tshernovits not merely as a milestone in the millennial struggle of Yiddish for symbolic recognition, but as symbolic of the best that Eastern European Jewry as a whole achieved and can offer to its far-flung progeny today. Tshernovits is viewed increasingly as a byproduct of the confluence of the three organized movements in modern Jewish life: Jewish socialism, Zionism, and neo-Orthodoxy. At Tshernovits, representatives of all three recognized the significance of Yiddish. Tshernovits was the byproduct of a confluence (and, therefore, it disappointed those who wanted it to be all theirs). It was a momentary confluence of three disparate forces; it quickly passed, and from that day to this, no one has been able to "put them together again." Indeed, distance does make the heart grow fonder.

> They were three, the convenors of the Tshernovits Conference: the champion of Jewish cultural renaissance and consistent Zionist, Doved Pinski. He came to the land (of Israel) in advanced age and died here. Khayem Zhitlovski, one of the first Jewish socialists who, after countless reincarnations in search for a solution to the Jewish question, in his old age sought to attach himself to the "Jewish" Autonomous Region, Birobidjan. And Nathan Birnbaum, the ideologist of Zionism and nationalism, who, after various geographic and ideological wanderings, after various apostasies and conversions, finally reached the shores of Jewish eternity. He waited for the Messiah all his life and suffered terribly the pangs of His delayed coming... He sowed everywhere and others reaped. He gave up this world for the world to come. All three of them served the Jewish people, each in his own way, and, as such, they [and Tshernovits] will remain in our historical memory. (Rosnak 1969)

Theoretical Recapitulations

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century efforts to gain and activate intellectual and mass support for Yiddish, and the Tshernovits Conference of 1908 in particular, illustrate several of the problems encountered in a particular type of language spread: the spread of a former L into H functions in High Culture (education, literature, scholarship), government, technology, and modern literacy-dependent pursuits more generally.

1. Many of those most active on behalf of advocating, rationalizing, and ideologizing this type of language spread will, themselves, have to learn how to use the erstwhile L in H functions, and, indeed, may have to learn the L *per se*. In this respect the spread of an L into H functions poses similar problems for those who are already literate (and who may, indeed, be the gatekeepers or guardians of literacy), as does the spread of any new vernacular into H functions. Nationalist language-spread movements that are not derived from an intragroup diglossia context (e.g., the promotion of Czech, Slovak, etc., in pre-World War I, or of Catalan, Occitan, Irish, Nynorsk, etc., more recently) also often begin with intelligentsia that do not know or master the vernaculars that they are championing. In the Yiddish case, many intellectuals of the late nineteenth century were not only oriented toward Hebrew/*loshn koydesh* as H for Jewish cultural affairs but

toward either German, Russian, or Polish as H for modern purposes. Thus, Ls existing within a traditional diglossia setting may face double opposition in seeking to attain H functions.

2. One set of factors hampering the spread of Ls into H functions is their own lack of codification (e.g., in orthography, grammar) and elaboration (in lexicon). However, there is a tension between such corpus planning, on the one hand, and status-planning needs, on the other hand. It is difficult to turn to serious corpus planning while status planning is still so unsettled (or opposed), and it is difficult to succeed at status planning (particularly insofar as attracting ambivalent or negative intellectuals and literacy gatekeepers is concerned) on behalf of an L that is clearly deficient in terms of corpus characteristics that might render it more suitable for H functions.

3. The vicious circle that exists between lack of corpus planning and lack of status planning is most decisively broken if a status shift can be forced (by legal reform, revolution, or disciplined social example). The Tshernovits Conference's gravitation toward the "political (status-planning) issue" was a spontaneous recognition of this fact, so often pedantically overlooked by language technicians and "experts" who are oriented toward the relatively easier corpus-planning task alone.

4. The very same intragroup and intergroup status and power reward systems that previously led intellectuals to seek and acquire literacy and position through one or more Hs subsequently hinder the spread of Ls into these H functions. Any such language spread would imply a major dislocation or a change in intellectual and econo-political elites and prerogatives. If Yiddish had achieved H intragroup functions in the cultural-intellectual realm, this would have threatened rabbinic/traditional and modern Zionist/Hebraist hegemony in that sphere. In addition, the spread of Yiddish into H functions would not only have meant the displacement of one power/status elite by another but the popularization/massification/democratization of intra-group political participation and a de-emphasis on elitism as a whole. This too is similar to the dynamics and consequences of many modern nationalist advocacies of vernaculars, except that the cultural-political opposition faced in the case of Yiddish may

have been more variegated insofar as "preferred" language is concerned, since not only Hebrew/*loshn koydesh* but Russian, German, and even Polish were its rivals for H functions throughout the Pale.

5. However, just as modern recognition of *Ausbau* languages (see note 20, below) derives more from their adoption for nonbelletristic than for belletristic functions, so it is the spread into econo-political functions that is particularly crucial in this century if status planning for erstwhile Ls is to succeed. In connection with Yiddish, only the Bundists seem to have glimpsed this truth before, at, or soon after Tshernovits (subsequently the Jewish communists—many of them ex-Bundists—did so as well, but with quite different purposes and results), and even they spoke of Yiddish more commonly in terms of cultural autonomy. Ultimately, however, their design foresaw a socialist revolution: the complete displacement of religio-bourgeois econo-political control and the recognition of separate but, interrelated and orchestrated, culturally autonomous populations each with control over its own immediate econo-technical apparatus. Although the political representation of Yiddish-speaking Jews as such (i.e., as a nationality with its own ethnonational [mother] tongue) in the coterritorial parliaments was advocated also by some Labor Zionists, by minor Jewish parties such as the Folkists and the Sejmists, and even by (some) ultra-Orthodox spokesmen (e.g., those of Agudes Yisroel), only the Bundists had a real economic realignment in mind with education, political, and cultural institutions deriving from and protected by firm Yiddish-speaking proletarian economic control.

6. The weak representation of Bundists at Tshernovits led to the complete neglect of a consideration of the economic basis of Yiddish as either *a* or *the* Jewish ethnonational language and to a complete preoccupation with cultural ideology, cultural symbolism, and cultural rhetoric. As a result there also arose the view that the Conference itself might be an ongoing moving force—either because it would have an executive office for "cultural work" or because it simply had convened and sent forth its resolutions into the world. However, languages are neither saved nor spread by language conferences. Ideology, symbolism,

and rhetoric are of undeniable significance in language spread—they are consciously motivating, focusing, and activating—but without a tangible and considerable status-power counterpart they become, under conditions of social change, competitively inoperative in the face of languages that do provide such. They may continue to be inspirational but—particularly in modern times—they cease to be decisive, i.e., they ultimately fail to safeguard even the intimacy of hearth and home from the turmoil of the econo-political arena. The ultimate failure of Tshernovits is that it did not even seek to foster or align itself with an econo-political reality that would seek to protect Yiddish in new H functions. The ultimate tragedy of Yiddish is that, in the political reconsolidation of modern Eastern Europe, its speakers were either too powerless or too mobile. They were the classical expendables of twentieth century Europe and, obviously, no language conference or language movement *per se* could rectify their tragic dilemma. Unfortunately, few at Tshernovits were sufficiently attuned to broader econo-political realities to recognize that instead of being en route to a new dawn for Yiddish, they stood more basically before the dusk of the Central and Eastern European order of things as it had existed till then.

7. However, it is the delicate interplay between econo-political and ethno-cultural factors that must be grasped in order to understand both success and failure in language spread. Any attempt to pin all on one or another factor alone is more likely to be doctrinaire than accurate. The Yiddish case, because it involves a diglossia situation and multiple possibilities for both L and H functions in the future, is particularly valuable because it makes the simultaneous presence of both sets of factors so crystal clear. Awareness of econo-political factors alone is insufficient for understanding the internal rivalry that arose from Hebrew/*loshn koydesh* or appreciating the fact that the latter was undergoing its own vernacularization and modernization at the very same time that Yiddish was being championed for H functions. On the other hand, no amount of internal ethno-cultural insight can explain the allure that German and Russian (and, to a smaller degree, Polish) had for the Jewish bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. Finally, as a capstone to what is already an

insuperable burden of opposition to Yiddish, there comes the linguistic relationship between Yiddish and German—the extra burden of all weak *Ausbau*[20] languages—and the cruel compound of moral, esthetic, and intellectual caricature and self-hatred to which that lent itself. After being exposed to such a killing array of internal and external forces for well over a century, is it any wonder that the 1978 Nobel Prize for literature awarded to the Yiddish writer I. B. Singer often elicits only a wry smile in what remains of the modern secularist world of Yiddish?[21]

Notes

1. The traditional coexistence of nonvernacular language of high culture (H) and a vernacular of everyday life (L), the former being learned through formal study and the latter in the context of familiar intimacy, was dubbed diglossia by Charles A. Ferguson (*Word*, 1959, 15, 325–40). Such contexts and their similarity and dissimilarity vis-à-vis other multilingual and multidialectal contexts have been examined by several investigators, among them John J. Gumperz, "Linguistic and social interaction in two communities," *American Anthropologist*, 1964, 66, no. 6, part 2, 137–53, and in my "Bilingualism with and without diglossia; diglossia with and without bilingualism," *Journal of Social Issues*, 1967, 23, no. 2, 29–38.

2. Throughout this paper, the distinction will be adhered to between the traditional amalgam of Hebrew and Aramaic, referred to by Yiddish speakers as *loshn koydesh* (Language of Holiness) and Modern Hebrew, as developed in Palestine/Israel during the past century as a language of all of the functions required by a modern econo-political establishment. Where the distinction between Hebrew and *loshn koydesh* is not clear or is not intended they will be referred to jointly.

3. For a full treatment of each of these four substantively distinct but also interacting views of Yiddish, see "The Sociology of Yiddish: A Foreword" in my *Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish Life and Letters*, The Hague, Mouton, 1981.

4. Halakhic, an adjective derived from halakha (Yiddish: halokhe), refers to the entire body of Jewish law (Biblical, Talmudic, and post-Talmudic) and subsequent legal codes amending, modifying, or interpreting traditional precepts under rabbinic authority.

5. Maskilic, an adjective derived from *haskala* (Yiddish: haskole), an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century movement among Central and Eastern European Jews, associated in Germany with the leadership of Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), designed to make Jews and Judaism more modern and cosmopolitan in character by promoting knowledge of and contributions to the

secular arts and sciences and by encouraging adoption of the dress, customs, economic practices, educational programs, political processes and languages of the dominant non-Jewish coterritorial populations. For observations as to differences between the *haskole* in Central and Eastern Europe, see D.E. Fishman 1985.

6. Both Zionists and socialists increasingly shifted from the second to the third positive view at or around the turn of the century. In 1889 the Zionist leader Nokhem Sokolov defended Yiddish merely as a necessary vehicle of mass agitation and propaganda (Roznak 1969), and even Herzl, who knew no Yiddish, founded a weekly (*Di velt*) in 1900 in order to reach the Eastern European masses. Similarly, socialist spokesmen such as Arkadi Kremer merely advocated the use of Yiddish in order to attain their mass educational purposes in 1893 and organized *zhargonishe komitetn* (Yiddish-speaking committees) in order to foster literacy and to spread socialist publications among Jews in the Czarist empire. Soon, however, a new (the third) tune began to be heard. In 1902 the Zionist editor Lurye (co-editor with Ravnitski of the well-known periodical *Der yid*) wrote that Yiddish must not only be considered as a means of propaganda but as "an ethno-national-cultural possession which must be developed to play the role of our second ethno-national language (Roznhak 1969)." In 1905 the Bund adopted its declaration on behalf of Jewish ethno-national-cultural autonomy with Yiddish as the language of the Jewish proletariat and of the intellectuals that serve and lead that proletariat. Scholarly literary organizations in the field of Yiddish began to arise soon thereafter: in 1908, The Yiddish Literary Organization (St. Petersburg); in 1909, The Yiddish Historical-Ethnographic Organization (St. Petersburg); and also in 1908, The Musical-Dramatic Organization (Vilna).

7. Birnbaum's advocacy of Yiddish deserves special mention and, indeed, further investigation in connection with the topic of re-ethnification of elites. Such re-ethnification and accompanying re-linguification is a common process in the early stages of very many modern ethnicity movements (see my *Language and Nationalism*, Rowley, Newbury House, 1972) and exemplifies both the proto-elitist return to (or selection of) roots (often after failure to transethnify "upwardly" in accord with earlier aspirations), as well as the masses' groping toward mobilization under exemplary leadership. However, modern ethnicity movements are essentially attempts to achieve modernization, utilizing "primordial" identificational metaphors and emotional attachments for this purpose. Thus, they are not really "return" movements (i.e. not really nativization or past-oriented efforts). They exploit or mine the past rather than cleave to it. Partially transethnified elites can uniquely serve such movements because of their own double exposure. Birnbaum is therefore exceptional in that he ultimately rejected his secularized, Germanized, Europeanized milieu on behalf of a "genuine return" to relatively unmodernized Orthodoxy. By the second decade of this century he had rejected Jewish modernization (in the guise of socialism, Zionism, and diaspora nationalism, all of which he had once charted)

as hedonistic and as endangering Jewish (and possibly world) survival. There is about the late Birnbaum a Spenglerian aura foretelling the "decline of the West" and cautioning Jews that their salvation (and the world's) would come only via complete immersion in traditional beliefs, values, and practices (Birnbaum 1918; 1946). He ultimately viewed Yiddish as a contribution toward *that* goal, rejecting its use for modern, hedonistic purposes such as those which he himself had earlier espoused both immediately before and after the Tshernovits Language Conference of 1908. This rare combination of complete Orthodoxy and uncompromising defense of Yiddish within an Orthodox framework has made Birnbaum into something of a curiosity for both religious and secular commentators. Such genuine returners to roots also exist in the context of other modernization movements (for example, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Greek, Arabic, Slavophile, and Sanskrit contexts) and represents a vastly overlooked subclass within the study of ethnicity movements. Even in their case it would be mistaken to consider them as no more than "spikes in the wheels of progress," merely because they frequently represent an attempt to attain modernization without Westernization. A contrastive study of Birnbaum and other such "genuine returners" would be most valuable for understanding this subclass as well as the more major group of "metaphorical returners." Note, however, that Birnbaum remained a committed advocate of Yiddish (although not in any functions that would replace *loshn koydesh*) even when he embraced ultra-Orthodoxy, whereas "true returners" in other cases embraced their respective indigenized classic tongues. To revive Hebrew was long considered anti-traditional and was not possible except in speech networks that were completely outside the traditional framework—ideologically, behaviorally (in terms of daily routine), and even geographically. The dubious Jewish "assets" of complete dislocation and deracination were denied the unsuccessful advocates of Sanskrit and Classical Greek, Arabic or Irish.

8. Tshernovits is currently located in the Ukrainian SSR, close to the Rumanian and the Moldavian SSR borders. Between the two World Wars it was in Rumania. At the time of the Language Conference, and ever since the Austrian occupation in 1774 (after defeating the Ottoman Turkish occupants), it was in a section of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy known as Bukovina (until 1918, administratively a part of Galicia, with which Bukovina remained closely connected as far as "Jewish geography" was concerned).

9. Territorialism acknowledged the need for planned Jewish resettlement in an internationally recognized and protected Jewish territory, but did not consider Palestine to be the only or the most desirable location for such resettlement in view of the conflicting claims and geopolitical perils associated with it. Various territorial concentrations in Eastern Europe itself, in Africa (Angola, Cirenaica, Uganda), in South America (Surinam), in North America (Kansas-Nebraska), in Australia (Kimberly Region) and elsewhere have been advocated since the latter part of the nineteenth century. At one point, Herzl himself was not convinced that a homeland in Palestine and only in Palestine should be adamantly pursued and was willing to consider a "way-station" elsewhere. Most territorialists split

with the Zionist movement and set up an organization of their own in 1905, when the Seventh Zionist Congress rejected an offer by the British government to create an autonomous Jewish settlement in Uganda. For a further discussion of Birnbaum's territorialism, see Chapters 6 and 7, below.

10. Corpus planning is one of the two major branches of language planning: the authoritative allocation of resources (attention, funds, manpower, negative and positive sanctions) to language. Corpus planning entails modifying, enriching, or standardizing the language *per se*, often through publishing and implementing orthographies, nomenclatures, spellers, grammars, style manuals, etc. Its counterpart is status planning, i.e., attempts to require use of a language for particular functions: education, law, government, mass media, etc. Corpus planning is frequently engaged in by language academies, commissions, or boards. Status planning requires governmental or other power-related decision-making and sanctions-disbursing bodies: political, religious, ethnocultural or economic. The two processes must be conducted in concert if they are to succeed and take hold across a broad spectrum of uses and users. Yiddish has constantly suffered due to deficiencies in the status-planning realm and, as a result, its corpus-planning successes are also limited, although several can be cited (Shekhter 1961). For a detailed empirical and theoretical review of language planning, see Joan Rubin, et al. *Language Planning Processes*, The Hague, Mouton, 1977.

11. Vays reminisces as follows (1937, i.e., nearly thirty years after the Conference):

> As is well known, Yiddish was not recognized in Austria as a language, just as the Jewish people was not recognized as such. At the university, e.g., it was necessary to fill out a rubric "nationality" and no Jew was permitted to write in "Jew." The nationalist-oriented Jewish students, not wanting to cripple the statistical distribution in favor of the ruling nationality to the detriment of the minority nationalities, sought various ways of forcing the authorities to recognize the Jewish nationality. Some wrote the name of a nationality that happened to occur to them. There was no lack of entries of "Hottentot" mother tongue and "Malay" nationality.

This context for the Conference led the Yiddish *Sotsyal demokrat* of Cracow to greet the Conference as follows: "The significance of the Conference is augmented by the fact that it takes place in Austria where Yiddish is closest to official recognition" (Kisman 1958). Tshernovits itself also impressed the delegates and guests from abroad (primarily from the Czarist empire) not only with its ethnic heterogeneity but with its "air of relative democracy, where at every step one could feel European culture" (Kisman 1958).

For Eastern European Jewry the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Austro-Hungarian monarchy represented Western-style democracy plus ethno-national-cultural rights, both of which were still sadly lacking in the Czarist empire and both of which were fundamental to the Conference's goals, although neither was explicitly referred to at the Conference itself.

12. The Bund (full name: Jewish Workers Bund [Alliance] of Russia, Lithuania and Poland) was organized in Vilna in 1897, the same year as the first Zionist Congress was held in Basel. Always socialist, it adopted a Jewish cultural-autonomist, Yiddish-oriented platform in 1905, as a result of which it clashed with Lenin, Trotsky, and other early Bolshevik leaders. The Bund became the mainstay of secular Yiddish educational, literary, and cultural efforts in interwar Poland. For further details and an entree to a huge bibliography, see Mendelsohn 1970 and Kligsberg 1974.

13. The "esthetic point of view" is dealt with at length by Miron (1973). Although not unknown in connection with other supposedly inelegant vernaculars during the period of struggle to legitimize them for H functions, the vituperation heaped upon Yiddish in terms of its claimed esthetic shortcomings clearly seems to border on the hysterical. Loathsome, ugly, stunted, crippled, mangled, hunchbacked, gibberish were commonplace epithets. "Away with dirt, with spiderwebs, with zhargon and with all kinds of garbage! We call for a broom! And whom the broom of satire will not help, him will we honor with the stick of wrath! Quem medicamenta non sanant, ferrum et ignis sanant!" (*Jutrzenka*, 1862, no. 50, 428). Note however that the esthetic metaphor (e.g., the German Jewish historian Graetz refused to "dirty his pen" with Yiddish or to have his works translated into that "foul tongue"), interesting though it may be in and of itself, must not obscure from analysis more basic, social, cultural and political goals and loyalties of those that express them. The Yiddish proverb "nisht dos is lib vos iz sheyn, nor dos is sheyn vos iz lib" (We do not love that which is lovely, rather we consider lovely that which we love) applies fully here. By the time of Tshernovits the full force of invective had begun to pass (although it can be encountered in Israel and elsewhere to this very day; see, e.g. Fishman and Fishman 1978) and the countertide of positive hyperbole had begun to rise, assigning to Yiddish not only beauty but virtue, subtlety, honesty, compassion, intimacy and boundless depth.

14. While it is certainly inaccurate to consider Mizes's comments as "the first scientific paper in Yiddish on Yiddish," it is not easy to say whose work does deserve to be so characterized, primarily because of changing standards as to what is and is not scientific. One of my favorites is Y. M. Lifshits's *Yidish-rusisher verterbukh* [Yiddish-Russian Dictionary], Zhitomir, Bakst, 1876, and his introduction thereto, both of which remain quite admirable pieces of scholarship to this very day. Other candidates for this honorific status abound, several of considerably earlier vintage.

15. Somewhat positive Zionist stances toward exilic Jewish vernaculars had surfaced from time to time well before Tshernovits. Reference is made here not merely to utilizing such vernaculars for immediate education/indoctrinational purposes, such usage being acceptable to almost the entire Zionist spectrum, but to allocating intimacy-related and even literacy-related functions to them, both in the diaspora and (even) in Erets Yisroel on a relatively permanent basis. Herzl himself (in his diary, 1885), suggests a parallel with Switzerland, such that Hebrew, Yiddish, and Judesmo (Judeo-Spanish) would be recognized. Except in Labor Zionist circles such views were very much in the minority, remained little

developed or concretized, but yet provided the basis for claims at Tshernovits that since many Zionists/Hebraists had been careful not to reject Yiddish, so Socialists/Yiddishists should do nothing to reject Hebrew/*loshn koydesh*.

16. Interestingly enough, the Balfour Declaration, issued by the British government on November 2, 1917, favoring "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jews, but without prejudice to the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities" also used the indefinite 'a' rather than the definite article 'the' as a compromise between opposite extreme views in the Foreign Ministry.

17. Several of the references and citations in this section are originally found in Rothstein 1977.

18. Just as Yiddish books commonly carried *loshn koydesh* titles until rather late in the nineteenth century, so Yiddish periodicals commonly bore either *loshn koydesh* or German titles even into the present century. The diglossic implications are manifold even at an unconscious level. The people of "The Book" was (and in the more unreconstructed Orthodox circles still is) accustomed to encounter serious H-level writing (and particularly such on intragroup concerns) in *loshn koydesh*. Thus, a Hebrew title for a Yiddish book is, in part, a visual habit, in part a cultural signal, and in part a disguise (vis-à-vis rabbinic criticism and other possibly hostile authorities). Similarly, a relatively ephemeral periodical dealing with the wide world of modern secular events is titled in German for much the same reasons. Neither *forverts* nor *yidishes* nor *tageblat* were part of commonly spoken Eastern European Yiddish by well before the nineteenth century. Nevertheless these were perfectly acceptable components of a journalistic title of those times, particularly in the United States.

19. Hasidism: a Jewish movement founded in Poland in the eighteenth century by Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov and characterized by its emphasis on mysticism, spontaneous prayer, religious zeal, and joy. The various hasidic leaders or masters (singular: *re'be;* plural: *rebe'yem,* as distinguished from *rov, rabo'nem* among non-Hasidic rabbis) typically instructed their followers through tales. Yiddish was, therefore, their crucial medium and their tales became an early major component of popular Yiddish publishing (many also being published—first, simultaneously or soon thereafter—in *loshn koydesh*). Although much opposed by most rabbinic authorities for almost two centuries (the latter and their followers being dubbed *misnagdem,* i.e., opponents of the hasidim), hasidism finally became generally accepted as an equally valid version of Jewish Orthodoxy and is a vibrant (and the more numerous) branch thereof, as well as a major (but largely unideologized) source of support for Yiddish, to this day.

20. *Ausbau* languages are those that are so similar in grammar and lexicon to other, stronger, previously recognized languages that their own language authorities often attempt to maximize the differences between themselves and their "Big Brothers" by multiplying or magnifying them through adopting or creating distinctive paradigms for neologisms, word order and grammar, particularly in their written forms. Thus, *Ausbau* languages are "languages by

effort," i.e., they are consciously built away (=German *ausbauen*) from other, more powerful and basically similar languages, so as not to be considered "mere dialects" of the latter, but rather, to be viewed as obviously distinctive languages in their own right. The *Ausbau* process is responsible for much of the difference between Landsmål/Nynorsk and Bokmal, Hindi and Urdu, Macedonian and Bulgarian, Moldavian and Rumanian, Belorussian and Russian. For the particular difficulties faced in finding, creating, and maintaining *Ausbau* differences, including examples from the Yiddish versus German arena, see Paul Wexler, *Purism and Language,* Bloomington, Indiana University Language Science Monographs, 1974. The original formulator of the term *Ausbau* (and of its contrast: *Abstand*) is H. Kloss (see: *Anthropological Linguistics,* 1967, 9, no. 7, 29–41).

21. Some additional useful secondary sources concerning the Tshernovits Language Conference are Goldsmith (1977), Passow (1971), and Lerner (1957). A literally endless list of other journal articles (pre-1928 but primarily post-1928, this being the date of Yivo's twentieth anniversary volume [Anonymous 1931]) remains to be exhaustively catalogued. The only treatment of the Hebraist reaction to the Conference is my preliminary study *Der hebreyisher opruf af der tshernovitser konferents,* Ms. 1983.

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